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GEORGE'S  
ENEMIES



A. R. HOPE



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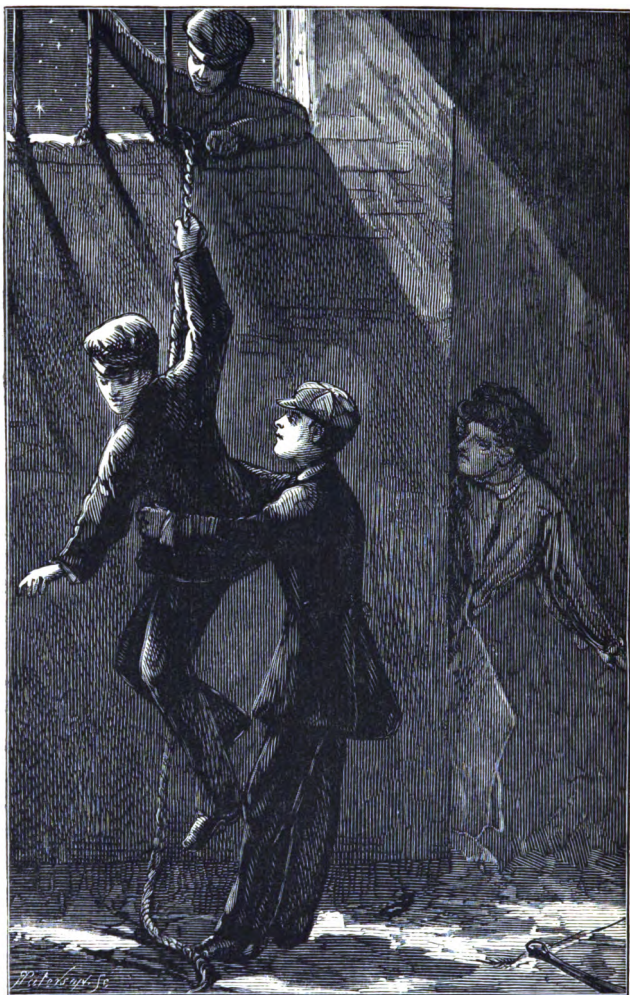












'There was just time to shrink back into a dark corner before Dunnismore's head appeared at the opening, and he climbed inside, followed by Marshall and Kennedy.'—*GEORGE'S ENEMIES*, page 116.

(*Frontispiece.*)

250. 9. 353.





# GEORGE'S ENEMIES:

A SEQUEL TO

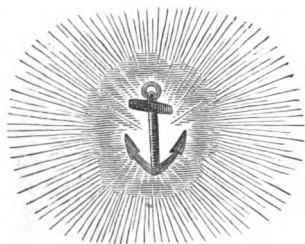
*"My Schoolboy Friends."*



BY

ASCOTT R. HOPE,

AUTHOR OF "MASTER JOHN BULL," "A BOOK ABOUT BOYS," "STORIES OF  
SCHOOL LIFE," "MY SCHOOLBOY FRIENDS,"  
ETC. ETC.



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## To J. S.

---

DEAR JACK, with brown and bearded face,  
In far-off Eastern lands,  
Does it not seem but yesterday  
We clasped each other's hands ?  
Across the years my memory flits,  
And we are schoolboys yet :  
Across the seas these pages fly,  
To ask if you forget.

Your heart is friendly still, and fresh ;  
And thus, if others fail,  
I know that you will read aright  
The meaning of my tale.  
Your eye can mark the golden thread  
In boyhood's home-spun years,  
Can find a lesson in its laugh,  
A smile behind its tears.

We thank the heaven that blessed our youth  
With sorrows and with joys,  
The heaven in which the sun of love  
Shines bright for kindly boys ;  
And pray that still these memories  
Of days that once have been,  
May fall like dew upon our hearts  
And keep our friendship green.



## PREFACE.

---

**T**HERE is the sequel to "My Schoolboy Friends," which I intended to write, and promised to write, and have been asked to write. The preface of that book will do for this one; but, once more, I must request that readers who require their fiction to be spiced with exciting and sensational incidents, will shut up the present volume and go in peace, to the nearest circulating library, where are to be found "The Benighted Bigamist" in three volumes, and "Paupukiklewinkle, or the One Legged Chief; a Story of Sport and Adventure."

This story was planned and partly written several years ago. For mentioning such an unimportant fact, I have a particular reason, which will be understood by more than one person whose eye may fall on these lines, and who may require an assurance that certain incidents related here are purely fictitious.

I have to thank several correspondents for the kind interest they have taken in the former book, and their courtesy in expressing it. I hope they will continue to feel equally friendly towards my "friends" as they appear in the following pages.

A. R. H.

LASSINGTON.





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# GEORGE'S ENEMIES.

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## CHAPTER I.

### COMING BACK.

**I**T was, I remember, a wet, slushy, miserable day. The sky was one dull sheet of lead ; the ceaseless rain fell without so much as a lively patter ; the gutters overflowed, and formed pools of water on the causeways. The streets of Whitminster were almost deserted ; and any luckless wight who was obliged to be out of doors, hurried along to obtain shelter from the drizzle blown into his face by the bitter east wind. The brick houses looked doubly dingy ; and the bare, damp gardens had a chilling air of winter about them. Not a green leaf, nor a ray of sunshine, nor a glimpse of blue sky ; surely it was cruel of nature thus to begrudge a single kindly smile to boys coming back to school after the Christmas holidays, just as if the road to learning were not stony and sloppy and sorrowful enough already. The very cab and omnibus horses seemed to drop their heads lower than usual, as they toiled up the hill with their load of boys and boxes.

A

Inside the schoolhouse, dull, if not sorrowful faces were likewise the order of the day. We were not of that modern race of schoolboys for whom the pill of instruction is so richly gilded that they return with delight to the temples of Minerva. One or two boys were gay and talkative as ever. Most of us concealed our sufferings under an air of manly resignation ; but nearly all were so dull and quiet that a nursery governess might have managed the most obstreperous. Submissive to our lot, we were clustering round the large fire in the schoolroom, and drying our wet clothes ; and in subdued tones talked over the faded glories of the holidays, or shuddered at the labours of the coming half. Only two comforts were available—to eat cake and to examine the new boys. The former article was present in abundance. There were about half-a-dozen of the latter, upon whom, of course, we looked down with a patronising and critical air, as if we had never been new boys ourselves. As is the manner of such unfortunates, they were undergoing the ordeal with different degrees of fortitude. Two or three seemed shy and timid, and held aloof, speaking only when spoken to, and smiling desperately at the pleasantries passed upon them. One was crying outright, and nursing his home-sickness in the furthest and coldest corner. One was holding his head very high, shoving his way among the crowd, boisterously bragging, and making an utter fool of himself in his overdone attempts to show that he was quite at home among his new companions. The last, a gentlemanly, smart looking boy, was the most successful in his first appearance. He showed himself neither frightened nor forward, but answered the questions asked him in a quiet, self-possessed tone, and was quite at his ease without delay.

"What is your name?"

"Dunnismore."

"Where do you live?"

"Birmingham."

"Have you been at school before?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Oh! different places."

"Have you got a cake?"

"No, but I have a lot of apples."

"Are you fond of swotting?"

"About as much as you are," said Dunnismore, politely, and was considered to have passed a good examination.

Then, to prove himself acquainted with schoolboy society, he, in his turn, began to make some inquiries in a practical and business-like manner.

"Do they cane here?"

"Rather!"

"All the new boys have it every second morning the first term; after that only once a week."

The speaker was Abbing, our old friend—may I call him so?—who was swinging his legs on the mantelpiece, and doing his best to infuse a little liveliness into the scene. To humbug a new boy was, of course, a great chance for Abbing; but Dunnismore only raised his eyebrows a little, and looked at him with a sort of pitying smile, and our respect for the new boy was increased.

"Do they give you much work to do?" he went on, taking no more notice of Abbing.

"H'm. Pretty well! Too much for my taste."

"Good grub?"



"Beastly. Same as at most schools."

"A great deal worse! A decent mouse would turn up its nose at the bread and scrape!" cried Abbing, from his elevation, and then our other jester began—

"We have hot water for breakfast, and potato peelings for dinner, and hot water for tea; and if they don't agree with us, we have Gregory's powder for supper," said Lessing.

"What sort of fellows are the masters?" Dunnismore went on, without even looking at Lessing.

"Don't mention them," entreated Abbing, with a shudder.

"Is the one who lives here strict?"

"That's what we want to know. We are going to have a new one, but he hasn't turned up yet."

"He can't be worse than Vialls, that's one comfort."

"I hope he will be a fellow like Paddy Williamson."

"Oh yes!" cried Abbing, ironically. "Williamson can be strict enough when he likes."

"What were masters ever made for?" propounded one youth of a philosophic turn of mind.

And there was a pause in the conversation for two minutes, for no one was able to solve this question, which might well engage the attention of more mature students.

"Some masters are not so bad as others," said a small boy, with an air of great wisdom.

"Some donkeys are not so big as others," quoth Abbing.

"I like these peppery ones best," said Lessing, reflectively. "They are always fizzing away, and don't have such bad blows up."

"The worst ones are the fellows that pretend to be friends with you, and then pitch into you when you are not expecting it."

"They are all a great nuisance," declared the boy who

had already shown an inclination to speculate on the origin of evil, and finding that the public agreed with him, went on to propose a new subject of discussion.

"While you are at it, you had much better wonder why we have to go to school at all."

"Ah!" groaned Abbing. "I wish I had the hanging of the fellow who invented them."

"I don't know," said Lessing. "You can't have everything you like in this world. Good and bad are mixed up somehow. If there weren't any canes, there wouldn't be any sugar; and if you didn't go to school, they wouldn't send you hampers. It comes more like right in the end."

"My people never send me hampers," remarked a boy of a matter-of-fact disposition.

"More shame for them, then," said Lessing; which remark seemed to be received by the company as savouring of great wisdom, and there was silence till somebody called out—

"Here's Marshall! How do you do, Marshall?"

"None the better for your asking," growled the new comer, a big, bony fellow, with a very red face. "They have put no fire in the studies, so I'll sit here, Wood."

"Oh, that's cool!" cried Wood, as Marshall turned him out of the warmest corner, and took possession by that oldest of laws, the right of the strongest.

"Very cold, indeed. That's why I want to sit beside the fire. I tell you, I have been shivering like fun upstairs."

"Oh, do go upstairs and shiver like fun again. I want to see how fun shivers."

"Hold your tongue, young Wood; and be thankful that I don't thrash you for not offering me a seat. Now, then, bring along the new boys, and let me see what they are made of."

While Marshall was thus establishing himself as the cock of the walk, some of us continued the conversation which his coming had interrupted.

"I shouldn't like to be a master. Should you, Smith?"

"No," replied I, with great decision.

"I don't know. It wouldn't be bad fun licking the fellows," said Abbing. "I'd walk into you, Mr Smith; wouldn't I just."

"I'd kick your shins."

"And correcting exercises! Jolly! I wonder they can bother with it."

"I'll bet Bentley has a headache every day. It must be awful work drumming it into fellows like Balbus."

Scarcely was the word spoken, when the door opened, and in walked Tom and Ben Cane, the latter grown a good deal since we saw him last, and now almost twice as big as his elder and more talented brother.

"Well, Balbus, how is the wall getting on?" was Lessing's greeting.

"Jawing away as much as ever, Monkey," said Tom Cane, condescendingly; and Balbus grinned all round, and proceeded to tug off his overcoat before wedging his way into the circle round the fire.

"What!" cried Abbing, with a start of amazement. "Do my eyes deceive me! Surely!—no!—yes!—it cannot be; and yet it is! Tails! Hold me! keep me up! I must faint! I can't help it."

"Shut up, Abbing," said Balbus, with dignity.

"Don't be cheeky or I'll lick you, Balbus. How much a piece for the tails? You'll be setting up whiskers next."

"Well, don't you wish you had some? Are there any new fellows?"

But Abbing was not to be extinguished. He jumped off his lofty station, and, stealing behind Balbus, gave him a pinch, whereupon Balbus howled fearfully and started off in chase, and they ran round and round the long table, jumping over chairs, boxes, and other obstacles. When this steeple-chase had afforded amusement to the public for some few minutes, it was put a stop to by Balbus tumbling head-long over a form which Abbing pushed in his way. Before he could pick himself up, Abbing had got on to the top of a large bookcase in the corner of the room, and was sitting there making faces and bombarding his adversary with a pea-shooter, when the door again opened, and enter Mrs Pearson, accompanied by a young clergyman, whom we at once guessed to be our new master, and fixed our eyes on him with the utmost interest. Unfortunately, we did not altogether keep our eyes off Abbing, who looked so funny perched up on his fortress, that one or two boys could not help raising a laugh, and a general titter ran through the room. Mrs Pearson, not perceiving the cause of our mirth, grew very indignant.

“What is this? I bring Mr Willoughby, your new master, to introduce him to you, and is this the first specimen he has of your conduct? He will think he has come among a set of boors.”

I felt moved to explain that we did not mean any disrespect to Mr Willoughby; but just then I caught sight of Abbing, looking gravely down and with upraised forefinger admonishing us to behave ourselves. So we roared again, and Mr Willoughby blushed and looked very unhappy.

“Come, Mr Willoughby,” cried our mistress, beckoning him to the door. “These boys will soon learn to behave

with at least outward respect, or I dare say you can find means of teaching them a lesson on the subject."

"Oh, never mind! They don't mean to be rude, I'm sure," Mr Willoughby was understood to stammer, and he hastily retreated, following Mrs Pearson, who sailed out with much dignity. Then while we were all glancing awkwardly at each other, uncertain what to do, Dunnismore sprang to the door and politely held it open for them to pass.

"Thank you," said Mrs Pearson. "I am glad to see that there is at least one boy in my house who knows how to conduct himself like a gentleman," and with this Parthian dart she disappeared, and left us feeling rather foolish.

"Is that the fellow!" exclaimed Marshall, when the door had closed behind him. "Why, he looks like a boy."

"He hasn't got any whiskers," said Balbus, whose mind was running on this subject, for reasons.

"We shall be able to manage him," chuckled Abbing. "I say, a great change from Vials, isn't it?"

"Vials *was* sharp!" cried Lessing, with respectful admiration.

"This fellow looks fearfully stupid."

"He won't have any fun in him like old Paddy Williamson."

"One blessing is, he doesn't wear spectacles like that fool Bentley. I dare say he'll play cricket."

"Begging your pardon, he had an eye-glass though. But it doesn't matter; any muff is good enough to be a master."

"Yes, but these fellows with spectacles are always looking about and seeing something that they ought not to see."

"Oh! Abbing, do you remember the fun when Bentley's spectacles broke, last half? Young Grey and I were making

faces at him and he couldn't see us, but Dalton was looking and—"

Thus far young Wood, when he found himself deserted by all his audience. We were rushing off to the door and warmly greeting a boy who had just entered. He is evidently a general favourite and an individual of some importance—indeed he is no less a person than George Kennedy, the hero of these pages ; so while he is shaking hands all round, let me introduce him to such readers as have not already made his acquaintance.

I thought George the handsomest, the bravest, the most sensible and generous fellow that ever lived ; and it is possible everybody may not agree with my estimate of him. But it can't be denied that he was a tall, active-looking lad, with sturdy limbs and broad shoulders, on which was set a head that seemed always to be held up boldly and to look all the world in the face with honest blue eyes and frank smile. Not that he was rude and self-asserting ; his fearlessness was tempered by modesty becoming the age of fifteen, and his light yellow hair and ruddy fresh complexion helped to make him look like an image of healthy, kindly boyishness. This was the usual impression given by his features and appearance. A physiognomist might have guessed what his friends knew well, that at times his face could wear a very different expression ; but I am minded here to praise George and not to analyse his character, and the reader will find out what his faults were soon enough without my proclaiming them. Nor will I thank any cold-minded critic who may seek to assure me that my hero was very much like other boys of his age and class, with perhaps a better appetite and more energetic nature, but with his own share, no more and no less, of schoolboy



vices and virtues. Even if I could believe this, I should not be thankful to be rescued from a most grateful error, by which it was once sweet to be deluded in days before one had

“Conned the bitter lie  
Of fashion’s dull philosophy,  
That friendship is an empty dream,  
And constancy a schoolboy’s theme.”

The other fellows rather laughed at my devotion to Kennedy. He was a favourite with most of them, nothing more—stay, yes, the champion of all the little fellows. Everybody was glad to see him back again, but when presently announcement was made that a cake was being cut up in the next room, most of his less devoted friends cut short their welcomes, and I was able to have him to myself. And as George had undeniably a soul above looking out for bits of cake, he proposed that we should go out a walk together.

It was fair now, and not a bad evening for an English February—that is to say, the sun was giving us a sulky glimpse of himself just before going to bed, and the east wind had grown ashamed of his heartless behaviour towards rheumatic old ladies. Not that we cared for the east wind as we walked arm in arm along the wet roadside, and talked about our holidays, and the coming half, and the new boys, and the old boys who had left, and other subjects full of interest to the schoolboy mind.

Upon this road, about a quarter of a mile from the town, was the cemetery. There we bent our way, though without so much as naming the place to each other; and when we arrived at the gate, we turned in and sought out a shel-

tered corner, and a little grave, marked only by a white marble cross, bearing this inscription :

HARRY KENNEDY,  
DIED AT WHITMINSTER SCHOOL,  
ON THE 12TH NOVEMBER 18—.

As we came up, the cross was brightened by a fitful ray from the setting winter sun. For a little we stood silently looking at it and thinking the same thoughts, till George said very quietly—

“It will be just a year and three months next Wednesday.”

“So it will,” said I, for something to say ; but my thoughts of Harry were none the less sad because I found no words to utter them. George and I understood one another without words or tears. And then his hand stole into mine, and again we stood silent and looked at the grave.

“Do you know,” said George, as we turned away, “my mother wishes me to be confirmed this year, and I think I should like to be.”

I immediately resolved that I should be confirmed also, and told him so. Those who have read the story of my schoolboy friends, will know what chord it was that had just been struck in both our hearts. Then we walked home through the cold evening air, and spoke very little till we came in sight of the gaslit windows of the school-house, and heard within the boisterous voice of Abbing engaged in his pet amusement of teasing the new boys. Such is schoolboy life.



## CHAPTER II.

### AN INTERREGNUM.

**M**Y readers must be made acquainted with certain changes that had taken place in the Whitminster School during the year that had passed since they may have last heard of it. Dr Pearson was dead, and Mr Dalton was now head-master in name, as he had been for some time in reality. *De mortuis nil nisi bonum.* We knew very little of the old doctor, and I am going to say nothing of him, except that for several years before his death he had done the school much harm by retaining his post long after he was able to perform the duties of it. Our numbers had been steadily dwindling, but it was hoped that we should make a fresh start under the new master.

Mr Dalton began now to take a greater number of boarders; but as his own house was still larger than he required, he made an arrangement with Mrs Pearson by which she continued to have possession of the Schoolhouse and to receive boarders, who were looked after by one of the assistant masters, as before. Most of her old boarders came back, but nearly all the elder boys in the house left

the school at Midsummer, so we were rather badly officered. There was only one prefect in the house, a fellow, Ellis—what we called a “swot,” a youth who worked very hard, but could do nothing else, and having neither strength of body nor force of character, had very little influence among us. Thus monitorial authority, so far as the house was concerned, practically fell into disuse. Marshall, Tom Cane, and two or three other fellows were in the fifth form; then came about a dozen boys in the upper and lower fourth, among whom were the reader’s humble servant and most of his friends whom he has previously introduced to the public. The rest were in the lower part of the school, and belonged to that class that we allowed ourselves to mention in a tone of good-humoured contempt, as the “cubs.” So fellows of the standing of Phillips and myself had studies, and thought ourselves persons of no small consequence in our little community, though, I am afraid, we were not a very trustworthy aristocracy.

While Mr Vialls remained as our dictator, this was not so much matter, for he took very good care that the state suffered no detriment. But, at Michaelmas, it befell that he left rather suddenly, to our great delight, for, of course, the mice don’t go into mourning when the cat takes her departure. We did not like him much, and now we saw a pleasant prospect of being our own masters. So long as we didn’t bother Ellis and the other big fellows, they left us alone; and our dignity—I am speaking of my set—did not prevent us from being ringleaders in all sorts of mischief. At meals, Mrs Pearson herself was generally present, and she kept us in some sort of order; but her part of the house was quite separate from ours, so at night we had things pretty much our own way, and a nice noise we used

to make when we ought to have been quiet in bed. Besides, we could go into the town at forbidden hours, and shirk preparing our lessons, and play other pranks in which we thought there was not much harm, but a great deal of fun.

To show the extent to which we were able to do what was right in our own eyes, I may mention that some of us, having captured a broken-down donkey on the common, led him home in triumph, and kept him for a fortnight in the lavatories, without any one saying anything about it, till, one day, he died, and we had ever so much difficulty in disposing of the carcass. They say that no such thing as a dead donkey is ever visible, but I found the falsehood of this saying to my cost; for never, in the palmiest days of donkeys, was a higher value put upon a live ass than was put upon this dead frame of skin and bones by the owner, who had, I believe, turned the poor beast out to die, and only discovered in what esteem he held it when he learned that it had died in our hands. But enough of this story; it will be hard to make the general public understand what fun we had with that donkey, though, if any of my old schoolfellows should see this page, they may remember all about it, and have a good laugh. I fear some of us got into more serious mischief. Mr Vials had broken us in to obey rules from no other motive than fear of the cane, and when that was taken away, we rejoiced in being able to follow our own sweet wills to a greater extent, and were envied by Mr Dalton's boarders, who could not so much as have a pillow-fight with impunity.

There was some delay in getting a new master, and, for a month or so, Mrs Pearson tried to manage, by having our friend Mr Williamson, who was a bachelor, to live in the

schoolhouse, and keep an eye on us. But we soon found that old Paddy, as we called him, was not disposed to interfere very much with our amusements. About lessons he was strict enough, but he seemed to look upon matters of discipline chiefly as opportunities for him to play his tricks and say his funny things, and we were very willing to consent to this arrangement. He duly installed himself in the official apartment, which we knew under the name of the Chamber of Horrors, and brought with him four canes, two long and thick, and two small supple ones, which he christened respectively Gog and Magog, and Cæsar and Pompey. If any fellow got into a scrape, he was invited to a friendly inspection of these implements, and might choose which he would be thrashed with—for Mr Williamson was a dominie of the old school, and not fond of impositions and other refined cruelties. Most of the boys used to choose Gog, which was very thick, but comparatively innocuous without an amount of exertion that a master was not often capable of in cold blood. Then the punishment would proceed in a spirit of pleasant good humour, and if the culprit ever shed a tear, Mr Williamson would drive it away with a laugh next moment. On such occasions, he was even more jovial and undignified than in school, and if you only took care to be jovial too, without being rude, you were sure to get off pretty easily, unless you had done something very bad.

I remember one day Mrs Bramble had complained of Lessing and me for making a disturbance at tea, and breaking a cup. We were summoned to trial, and Phillips and Abbing, taking a great interest in such scenes, must needs follow us on tiptoe as far as the door of the room, where they were minded to amuse themselves by being auditors,

if not spectators, of our execution. Mr Williamson asked us, in a very stern tone, why we broke cups, and whether we wished to bring our fathers' grey hairs with sorrow to the grave? then, pulling our hair and knocking our heads together, he was about to dismiss us with a caution, when he heard a slight scuffling of feet at the door, and darting out, dragged in the two eavesdroppers. Without listening to their excuses, he pulled out Pompey, and caned them then and there, joining in the roar of laughter with which Lessing and I saw their discomfited countenances. They never heard the end of that joke.

Another instance I remember of Mr Williamson's peculiar way of enforcing discipline. One night in our dormitory, we were in the middle of a great cricket match with the opposite room. The players were even in scantier attire than is usual upon such occasions. We used our brushes for bats, and the ball was a piece of soap. George Kennedy was in, making a tremendous score, and the fellows of our dormitory were sitting on the beds applauding him loudly. We felt quite secure, for was not old Balbus posted as sentinel on the dormitory stairs? Alas! we did not know that this fat and heavy-minded youth, too comfortably wrapped in his rug, had fallen fast asleep, and that even then the enemy was stepping over his prostrate body, and advancing cautiously upon us.

"Well hit! Well hit, indeed, sir! Run it out, Kennedy! Look sharp and shy it up, you blind donkey; there it is under the basin-stand! What's the score now?"

In the midst of this hubbub enter Mr Williamson, and there is a sudden silence, followed by a little foolish tittering.

"Ah, ha!" says the master, snatching Kennedy's brush from him and giving him a vigorous smack with it. "I

must play at this game, I think ; but I haven't got my bat with me. Go to your dormitories, all of you, and wait till I come. I'm going to sharpen the cane," he added, in a terrible voice.

All the fellows scampered off, and left the dormitory to speculate upon what was going to happen. We fully expected to see Mr Williamson return with Gog and Magog, so no one went on undressing ; indeed, we were careful to put on all our clothes again, and sat on our beds for five minutes, prepared for the worst. At the end of that time the gas was turned off, but Mr Williamson did not appear, and after waiting half-an-hour longer, we saw that he had been humbugging us, and went to bed, voting him a jolly fellow, and remitting the sentence of flipping that had been unanimously passed on Balbus for neglect of duty.

"You are stupider even than I thought you, Balbus," said Lessing, upbraiding that worthy. "The Capitol at Rome was saved by the cackling of the geese, so we supposed we could trust you."

"I don't understand what you mean," said Balbus, with imperturbable good humour.

Next morning Mr Williamson had a good laugh at us, and asked if we had not caught cold by sitting up to wait for him. We thought this a capital joke, but we made a mistake in supposing that it was always to be a joking matter. Two or three nights afterwards, we were emboldened into having a greater row. Nearly all the boys who did not sleep in the studies, were playing hockey on the landing with their towels and sponges, and making noise enough to be heard in the road outside. In the middle of the sport, Ellis brought a very polite message from Mr Williamson, who sent his respectful compliments, and begged that



one boy from each dormitory would do him the honour of stepping into his room for a moment. We knew that he was in earnest, and at once stopped our game and proceeded to select victims to appease the rage of offended justice. George Kennedy and Balbus volunteered straightway, and the other fellows drew lots. Then the five doomed ones attired themselves in their jackets for the sacrifice, and were led off by Ellis to the den of the monster, from which they presently returned, exhibiting no white sail in token of safety, but several plain and expressive signs of what they had just undergone. This taught us to be rather more cautious about our illegal performances ; but, on the whole, we had an easy time of it under Mr Williamson, which was chiefly the reason that his successor had not an easy time of it.

I should like to tell some more stories about this eccentric preceptor of ours, but I am afraid that old Paddy Williamson is not approved of by all my readers. Grave critics have frowned over my former account of him, and have said that he was a most unfit person to be master of a school. But I feel that I ought to speak a word for him, after having brought him into such discredit. He wasn't such a bad master as might have been thought. He made fun too often, perhaps, but he kept us to our work, and taught us well, not neglecting the stupid and lazy boys, as some less genial, and—as they would say—more conscientious dominies do. If he did not treat the ordinary routine of discipline with enough seriousness, he never failed to show a becoming indignation at every instance of meanness or injustice. He was hot-tempered, but kind-hearted, and he did not worry his boys by constant pulling at the bit, though he sometimes gave the reins a sharp jerk after letting them lie too loose for a time. At all events, we liked him, and I

do believe he did us more good than many masters would have done who were as incapable of his faults as of his merits. Peace be with thee, Paddy Williamson ! At this day, I, who know so little, know every tense of *tupto*, and every irregular Latin verb to a *t*, and this was thy doing. For my small browsings in the classic vales, I have, indeed, to thank no virtue of my own, but old Williamson's jovial and boisterous shepherding, and the teeth of these efficient sheep-dogs, Cæsar and Pompey. It would ill become me to be ungrateful.

Mr Willoughby, his successor, was in every way a contrast to him, as we soon found. He was young, and looked still younger. It was said in the school that he had never been a master before, and he certainly seemed to be unaccustomed to boys, and to feel not at his ease among them. During the first two days, he made one or two attempts to be friendly with us, which broke down and resulted in an awkward feeling on both sides ; then he retired into his shell and maintained a reserve which we did not rightly understand. We imagined that he was afraid of us at first, and so he was, perhaps ; but we found before long that he was determined to be very conscientious about his work, and would put up with no nonsense. Mr Abbing, and one or two gentlemen of that sort, lost no time in trying to see how far they could go with him, but he put them down at once. He was terribly cold and stiff, we thought. He seemed to have no humour about him ; he was neither bilious, like Mr Vials, nor jovial, like Mr Williamson. If Whitminster had been a private academy, where baiting the ushers was a regular and recognised amusement, our new shepherd would have had a hard time of it ; but we were accustomed to being governed firmly, and by gentlemen, and were more

cautious and considerate in carrying on the warfare which we looked upon as natural between boys and masters. So we felt our way, as it were ; for of course the new master's character was a subject of great importance to the school, and especially to Mrs Pearson's boarders, on the pains and pleasures of whose daily life he could not but have so much influence.





## CHAPTER III.

### THE NEW MASTER.

**S**EVERAL days passed, and we had no opportunity of testing the mettle of our new master. We were orderly and subdued, as is usual with schoolboys for the first week or so after the holidays, before the imp of mischief engendered among them has begun to wax fat and kick. Mr Willoughby was quiet also. We did not know what to make of him, and he seemed not to have quite taken our measure. Both sides were standing to their arms and waiting for the first shot to be fired. We began at length to get impatient for the commencement of hostilities. We couldn't understand a master who did not even scold. For a time his shy, polite manner kept us in check more effectually than if a whole battery of Viallses had opened upon us with grape and canister. *Ignota refugimus arma.*

I think I have mentioned already the studies which we elder boys occupied. They were small, as is the nature of such establishments, but in our eyes they were perfect palaces of luxury and comfort, and we highly enjoyed the dignified privilege of sitting there and learning our lessons

out of the school-room, where, at "preparation" time, the master's presence forbade those relaxations and diversions which lightened, at the same time that they lengthened, our hours of labour. Perhaps the authorities who built studies in the schoolhouse did not contemplate that they should be used by senior boys of fifteen and fourteen. At all events, it was never contemplated that the stoves with which they were warmed should be used for making toffee, and other culinary pursuits to which we were addicted, especially when we had returned from home with plenty of money and store of apples, ham, eggs, and other raw materials for schoolboy banquets. Mrs Pearson took this view of the subject, and had forbidden all such illicit cookery, a prohibition that under Mr Vialls' *regime* was strictly enforced. While Mr Williamson with easier hand held the sceptre, we had got into the way of it, however, and one morning soon after the holidays, Mrs Pearson, making a tour of inspection over the house, was horrified to find the said stoves in a state which shocked the good lady's sense of propriety. Moreover, a gas lamp had been broken by an ill-directed slipper, sent by way of shell into the study at the end of the row, and the waste-pipe of the lavatory in the passage was found to be stopped up by pieces of orange-peel. According to the constitution of our state, Mrs Pearson did not interfere much in ordinary matters of discipline, but delinquencies of this sort never failed to rouse her wrath, and stir her up into demanding the aid of the secular arm for the punishment of the offenders. So she first gave a smart scolding to the servants by whose good nature this sad state of things had till now been concealed from her, and then called upon Mr Willoughby to do his duty in the matter.

The first intimation we had of a "row" being on the carpet was Mr Willoughby's making a long speech to the boarders after tea. Mr Vials would have sent for the accused, and disposed of the matter in about three minutes. But our new master surprised and rather amused us by the way in which he treated it. He explained to us the damage that had been done, and expressed his sorrow that he should be called on at the very beginning of our acquaintance to interfere with any of our pleasures. He felt sure that it was from thoughtlessness, and not from any wanton spirit of mischief, that we had given Mrs Pearson this cause for complaint. He then entered into a short discourse upon the rights of property, pointed out the folly of useless destruction, and warned us against the danger of temptations, first, to gluttony, and, second, to disobedience. He hoped that we should see the justice of what he said, and that our good sense and right feeling would lead us to respect Mrs Pearson's wishes as well as her property. Nevertheless, he thought it necessary to mark his feeling of the irregularity that had taken place, by ordering all the study boys, except the eldest ones, to sit in the schoolroom for the future in the evenings, and to learn their lessons there. He would have great pleasure in relaxing this rule, so soon as he found that we were to be trusted to refrain from such acts of mischief and carelessness as those which Mrs Pearson had complained of.

This oration lasted nearly ten minutes, and was delivered in a very quiet and kindly tone, with a certain hesitation and want of clearness of expression, which seemed to show that our master was rather too much afraid of us to make us much afraid of him. This was the view of some youthful politicians, who straightway gave themselves up to rejoicing at the easy time of it which seemed to lie in prospect for us

under this new government. Others—for of course this first message from the throne was keenly discussed among us—expressed themselves as of an opposite opinion, and oracularly warned their fellow-citizens not to put their trust in pedagogues. To these wise heads, all the more danger was concealed in the honeyed words of our new tyrant. This opinion did not gain credit among the mob ; but most of us still knew not what to make of Mr Willoughby, and two or three days passed before any further light was thrown on his character and plan of action.

"This will never do !" exclaimed Lessing, one night, as we were sitting round the schoolroom fire. "I want to see what sort of a fellow this new master is, and he won't show me."

"Go and ask him," suggested George Kennedy.

"When is he going to begin to cane, I wonder?" asked Abbing.

"Perhaps he isn't going to cane fellows at all," said Phillips. "At the school I was at before, they never licked you."

"Where was that?" inquired Abbing, with much interest.

"Don't be alarmed, Abbing. Paddy Williamson said yesterday that he had lent Willoughby Cæsar and Mago, and so we had better look out, he said."

"I wish we had Williamson here still," remarked I, and, this being received with general assent, there was a pause in the conversation, and we looked meditatively into the fire.

"I hope he won't give impositions, anyhow," said Kennedy.

"Too good news to be true," sighed Lessing.

"I say, you fellows," cried Little Wood—*Little Wood* no

longer, by-the-bye, for he had now two younger brothers at the school, and had himself attained to the dignity of the third form—"I vote we all tear, 'The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,' out of our poetry books. Vialls always gave us the Curfew to write, and they are beastly long lines. Perhaps, if this new fellow sees it, he will give us it, too."

"Ah, but perhaps then he'll give us 'The Armada,' and these lines are much longer," said a second form fellow, sagely.

"Never mind; it's good for you small fellows to have your idle hands kept out of mischief," said Phillips.

"Oh, yes, Jemima! You fellows in the fourth are too good to get impositions, I suppose! We all know that."

"Don't you be cheeky, you cub, or I'll lick you. Of course we have impositions, but we get gentlemanly and respectable lines to write, out of Virgil."

"I wish they'd put us into the Odes of Horace," said Lessing. "That's the sort of lines for a gentleman."

"I hope I'll never get into the fifth form," remarked Balbus, despondingly. "They have to write Greek lines out of Livy, I think they call it, and put in all the accents."

"We haven't had a single licking this half yet, at the schoolhouse, nor a single imposition, nor a single detention," said Abbing, pensively.

"Well you should know, Abbing; for you are sure to be the first fellow to get into a scrape. I wish you would go and do something bad, for I should like to see how Wiloughby would lick you."

"*Fiat experimentum in corpore vili*, as Williamson says," suggested Lessing; but the joke fell on unappreciative ears.

"Don't talk shop, Monkey," said George Kennedy.



"Say that in English; we don't understand monkey-language."

"I was remarking sir, that life is unendurable in the present condition of affairs, and I should like a little excitement to vary the monotony of our existence. In the language of the poet, *Vir bonus, magister docet, si tu et Tullia valetis*. Why doesn't some fellow get into a row?"

"Why don't you get up one yourself, Lessing?"

"Well, I'm game, if any other fellow is?"

"So am I," declared Phillips.

"Come along, then. Let us set the schoolhouse on fire, and singe Mrs Pearson's wig."

"Break a lot of windows," suggested one small boy, whose conceptions of evil-doing were limited.

"No, I'll tell you what," proposed another boy. "Let us draw lots who will shy a book at another fellow in preparation, and see what Willoughby will say."

"What's the good of that?" growled Kennedy, who was in a bad humour.

"Oh! it's humbug drawing lots," said Abbing. "Why don't you do it, if you proposed it?"

"Because I thought you were the only fellow who had pluck enough, Abbing."

"I don't see any pluck in that."

"Let us do it," said Lessing. "Which of you fellows will agree to draw lots?"

"Well, only us fellows in the fourth form," said Kennedy. "There's no use of dragging any of the small cubs into it."

"He can't do much to you. Come along."

At this point, Abbing and one or two others found a reason for leaving the group for a few minutes. About half-a-dozen of the fourth form fellows, however, remained,

and proceeded to draw lots which of them should bell the cat. The consultation of the oracle was accomplished in a convenient and classical manner, which obtained commonly among us for purposes of divination.

Each boy took his Virgil, and opened it at a given signal. The top lines of the page thus opened by chance were compared, and whichever of them commenced by the letter nearest the beginning of the alphabet, was held to have been chosen by fate to indicate the lucky or unlucky individual, according to circumstances.

Upon this occasion nearly all of us got *Talia, Sate, Ut*, or some such safe word, and the lot fell upon Phillips, with nothing more dangerous looking than *Nox erat*. Having satisfied himself that none of the lines began with an earlier letter than *N*, Miss Jemima assumed an appearance of cheerful submission, and began to prepare for the altar.

"All right! I'll shy my dictionary at you, Kennedy, as soon as we have sat down to preparation."

"Be sure and don't hit me then, Jemima, or I'll shy it back and break your head."

"Remember to do it when he is looking, you know. I say, Phillips, my boy, you'll catch it."

"Oh! I don't mind," said Phillips. "I should like to see whether he can cane as hard as Vialls."

"I don't believe you would do it, if you thought you would be caned," said George Kennedy. "You know well enough you will only have a scolding, or an hour's detention."

"Who cares for that!" cried Jemima, looking very cocky.

Phillips wasn't long kept in suspense. In about twenty minutes the bell rang; the boys ran to the lavatory to take off their boots, and then came flocking back to the school-

room ; and in marched Mr Willoughby to superintend preparation. We got out our books from our shelves, and sat down to our lessons, taking as long about it as we could, after the manner of idle boys.

"Will you begin work, please," said Mr Willoughby. "I wish you would not be so long about taking your places every evening."

"Now, Jemima," we whispered, and Phillips took up his dictionary, and glanced at the master.

"Silence !" requested Mr Willoughby, looking hard at that end of the table.

"Go on ! Now's your time ! You promised, you know !" and his neighbours on each side nudged Phillips, who, however, looked irresolute, and after waiting for Mr Willoughby to turn his back, laid down the dictionary and gave it up as a bad job.

We were disgusted at being deprived of the scene we had expected for our amusement, and after preparation we upbraided Phillips in no very polite terms for his want of resolution. His defence had a great deal of truth in it.

"You would have been afraid, too. I didn't like to, somehow or other, when I saw him looking so hard at me."

"Oh, Jemima, what a muff you are !" cried Abbing.

"Yes, and you would have been more afraid than me," retorted Phillips.

"Well, but I didn't promise."

Luckily for Phillips, somebody produced a hamper of apples just then, and this diverted the public attention, and saved him from further reproaches.

But if we were minded to get into a scrape with Mr Willoughby, we were not long in having our wish gratified.





‘The chariots were composed of railway rugs and pillows; to each of them were harnessed two boys, and a third sat inside and urged on the fiery steeds by flipping them with a towel.’—**GEORGE’S ENEMIES**, page 29.

That evening the fellows in our dormitory thought fit to recreate themselves with the pastime of chariot-races before retiring to rest. As this room was nearest the passage through which we were most likely to be interrupted by a visit from the authorities, we thought it necessary to be cautious, and took it in turns to stand sentry outside. One decidedly amiable feature of Mr Willoughby's character was, that he always approached the dormitories according to the rules of chivalrous warfare, tramping along the passages in an open and honest manner; whereas Mr Vials had a trick of stealing about in his slippers, and coming down upon you like a wolf on the fold, without so much as a cough to give you notice. On the other hand, the new master visited the dormitories oftener than he had done, so we did not consider that we had gained much.

Well, Lessing was posted to watch for the advance of the enemy, and the rest of us were enjoying ourselves in the way I have said. The chariots were composed of railway rugs and pillows; to each of them were harnessed two boys, and a third sat inside and urged on the fiery steeds by flipping them with a towel, while they did their best, not only to win the race, but to turn their driver out on the floor. It may easily be imagined that such a diversion was productive of great delight to the well regulated schoolboy mind, and we were racing about in high glee when Lessing burst into the room exclaiming, "To bed, to bed, sir consul! Lars Por-sena is here."

"Who is that?" said Balbus; but the rest of us were quicker of apprehension. In an instant the gas was turned off, and we hurried away to our beds like rabbits to their holes, and were all safe underneath the blankets just as Mr Willoughby entered with a candle in his hand.

"I think the gas was lit in this room, a moment ago," he said, looking round ; but no one seemed willing to express any opinion on the subject.

"Had you not the gas lit till just now?" he repeated. "Kennedy, I believe you are the senior boy in the room."

"Yes, sir," said Kennedy.

"Did I not tell you the other day that I wished all lights to be out a few minutes after you came upstairs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you any excuse to make for disobeying me?"

No answer.

"Have you been allowed hitherto to keep the gas lit and make disturbances in your dormitories?"

"Wasn't it one of the other dormitories, sir?" said Abbing.

"No, it was this dormitory. I wish you would listen to me, boys, for a minute, and I will explain to you the course I intend to pursue about these irregularities, which, I am afraid, you have been too much accustomed to."

"We shall be delighted, sir," said Lessing, jumping up in bed and assuming an attitude of respectful attention, which was too much for our gravity. There was a titter all over the room, and poor Mr Willoughby quite broke down in the speech which he seemed about to enter upon.

"I am sorry you think it necessary to be impertinent to me," he said nervously, looking hard at Lessing, who at once subsided. "I had hoped you would listen to reason. But if you intend to make a joke of disobeying the rules of the house, I must, of course, enforce them by punishments. All the boys in this dormitory will come to me to-morrow after breakfast." And out he went, leaving us to upbraid Lessing with his rash interference.

"Why, man, if you had let him alone he would have let

off all he had to say at once, and we should have heard nothing more about it. Now, he is in a wax, and we shall catch it."

"It's about the mildest kind of a wax I ever saw," said Lessing. "But you needn't complain. All you fellows were wanting to have a row to-night, and now that you have got a nice fat one, you are sighing and groaning like a set of porpoises with a cold in their heads. To-morrow we'll all see Mr Willoughby's performances, and that will be jolly ; or we'll get off, and that will be jolly too ; for the meanwhile, anyhow, let us be happy."

This was sound philosophy, and we were rather tired ; so, after a little more conversation, we composed ourselves to sleep. But next morning we could not help speculating again as to the punishment which was in store for us, and Abbing threw out a bright idea.

"If he does lick us, I'll bet he's jolly green about it, so let us put on our towels under our jackets, and he'll never find out !"

"Abbing, for once in your life, you speak like a book," we declared, and the suggestion was acted upon. We folded our towels, and disposed them carefully in the region usually affected by the operations of the cane ; and Lessing, who expected to come in for the largest share of whatever might be going, went further in his precautions, putting on his night-shirt and a jersey, in addition to the customary garments of everyday schoolboy life.

Thus equipped, and our hearts likewise fortified with oak and triple brass, we ate our breakfasts with an even mind, and thereafter boldly proceeded into the presence of offended justice.

But we found that our preparations for the worst were



unfounded. We were to have no other punishment than another long speech. Mr Willoughby received us very politely, and, first of all, asked if we had any explanation to make of the irregularity that he had noticed last night.

"We were making a row, sir," replied George Kennedy.

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Mr Willoughby, looking pleased. "Your frankness relieves me from the most disagreeable part of my duty in the matter. But I wish to explain to you, what I am afraid schoolboys do not sufficiently understand—the *reasonableness* of school discipline, and I hope that I may succeed in persuading you to submit to it cheerfully and readily. The power given into my hands, I need scarcely say, is not to be exercised at my own caprice, or for my own satisfaction, but entirely for your good. The benefit which living under wise and just restrictions will bring to your character and well-being, both now and afterwards, is so great and so undoubted, that when you take it into consideration, you will see that the apparent harshness with which—at rare intervals, I hope—it may be my duty to enforce these restrictions, should rather be looked upon as the truest kindness. These restrictions themselves, too, may occasionally appear harsh, as in the case of this rule, that you are all to go to bed at a fixed hour, and not to disturb one another, or the rest of the house, by making disturbances. Another time, when I have an opportunity of speaking to you all together, I hope to be able to satisfy you, that such a rule is just and necessary. At present, I am only obliged to show you that you have disobeyed a positive rule, which has been in force in the house for years, and to which I called your attention so recently, that you cannot plead ignorance of it. Obedience is the soul of discipline, and I should be wanting in my

duty if I allowed you with impunity to neglect yours in this respect. At the same time, I wish to make every allowance for faults that spring only from high spirits and a love of fun ; and, as you have met me half-way, as it were, by a frank confession of your fault, I hope I may safely pass it over this time, with no other notice than a caution that in future I shall take all necessary means of enforcing obedience to this, as to other rules. Do you understand me ? ”

“ Yes, sir,” we mumbled ; though, to tell the truth, some of us had rather a vague idea of what on earth he was driving at.

“ I mean, that I shall have to punish any boy whom I may find out of bed after the proper hour.”

This was plain enough, and we began to feel rather disappointed that we were not going to suffer the extreme penalty of the law on the present occasion, after having made such satisfactory arrangements for a display of fortitude.

“ As for you, Lessing—I think that is your name ”—said Mr Willoughby, “ your case stands upon a different footing. You not only joined in disobeying the rules, but you allowed yourself to be impertinent to me, when I was attempting to call you to account for it. You put me thus in a very painful position ; but, after reflection, which has given me an opportunity of weighing the matter, and assuring myself that I do not act from personal feeling, I see that I have no choice. I hope you will all understand that I wish my intercourse with you to be on the most friendly and familiar footing consistent with the maintenance of discipline ; but I have laid it down as a rule for myself, not to allow the slightest want of respect to be

shown to me when in the exercise of my duty, and if you will think it over, you will see the propriety and justice of this. I am sorry to say that this is not the first time that an attempt has been made to test my—I mean, to endeavour—in fact, to be rude to me; and I am therefore reluctantly obliged to punish you, Lessing, as an example which, I hope, it will not be necessary to repeat. I will take into consideration the thoughtlessness which no doubt prompted your foolish speech last night, and the unsettled state of affairs which is natural to a change of masters; but I cannot altogether pass it over. I think I must ask you to write fifty lines?”

Lessing had no doubt fully expected all this mountain of words to bring forth something more than such a small mouse; and now he looked up to the master, with an expression of penitence and humility, which we, who knew him, well understood, and could scarcely keep from laughing.

“Please, sir, may I be caned?” he said.

“Oh, no! I don’t wish to be so severe. Perhaps I haven’t explained to you fully enough the view that I take of —”

“But I think I ought to be caned, sir,” said Lessing, with profound respect. “I know I was very rude last night, and I deserve to be severely punished. Please cane me, sir.”

“Really, I don’t know. I don’t like to use these harsh measures upon such slight grounds,” said Mr Willoughby, nervously.

“But I should like it, sir. Mr Vialls would have caned me, and I know I ought to be. Only, please don’t keep me waiting. Shall I stand here, sir? You must take care, sir, to come to this side. Mr Vialls once broke the gas-lamp when he was caning me, sir.”

Our new master hesitated—seemed puzzled. But Lessing resolutely placed himself in the proper attitude, with his face to the wall, and Mr Willoughby, after fidgeting for a little with the lock of a well-known cupboard, produced our old friend, Cæsar. He held it in his hand gingerly, and looked very unhappy. Then a thought struck him which gave him some relief. He ordered us all out of the room, except Lessing.

Of course, we obeyed ; but, almost equally of course, we waited at the end of the passage to see or hear the end of this strange scene. We waited several minutes, after which faint and dull sounds were heard of a chastisement which was going on behind the scenes, as it were. Then the door opened, and out came Lessing, weeping bitterly, while Mr Willoughby, with his hand on the boy's shoulder, was kindly telling him not to mind, and that the pain would soon be over. For once, at all events, I think, the school-master's stock profession, that he feels the pain of a punishment more than the peccant pupil, was realised.

We fled to the schoolroom, and after us came Lessing, still covering his face with his hands, and weeping loudly.

"La !" said one of the maid-servants, who was clearing away the breakfast things in the dining-hall, "this new master is as hard on them as Mr Vialls, though he looks so innocent like. Poor lad ! I dare say he hasn't been doing anything very bad, too."

When Lessing found himself among the boys, he at first made a slight attempt to maintain his disconsolate air, but it was no use. We all came flocking round him with eager curiosity ; he looked up with a sly grin, and then the school-room rang with a tremendous shout of laughter.

The other fellows were highly interested and amused by

our account of Mr Willoughby's way of administering justice; and Lessing's trick was voted the best joke that had been heard of for a long time. But in the middle of our merriment, in came Mr Willoughby, and the group gathered round us dispersed in various directions, as if conscious of something wrong. We stopped laughing and looked grave, but our gravity was severely tried by what followed.

"Oh, Kennedy," said Mr Willoughby, "I wanted to speak to you and the boys in your dormitory about your towels. Mrs Bramble has just been to me to say that she can't find them anywhere. Do you know anything of them?"

If the other fellows felt as I did, we did not know what to do with our eyes just then. We dared not look at Mr Willoughby, and still less at each other's faces. Where were our towels, indeed?

"Towels, sir?" stammered George Kennedy.

"Yes, the towels in your dormitory. Every one of them has disappeared this morning, the matron says."

"Perhaps she has taken them away to wash," suggested Abbing.

"She says not," said Mr Willoughby, more sharply than was his custom. Then, in his usual tone, he went on: "These towels must be found and put back again by dinner time, please, or all the dormitory shall have an hour's detention."

We waited till he was well out of hearing, and then there was another outburst of laughter.

"How jolly green he is," was Abbing's opinion; but some of us were not quite so sure that Mr Willoughby had not a suspicion of the truth of the matter. At all events,

we agreed that we had better take care to obey him. But there was a difficulty about putting back the towels, for we were strictly forbidden to go into our dormitories after breakfast. It was almost nine o'clock, and we had no time to spare, so we hastily divested ourselves of these unusual garments, and Kennedy and I took the whole lot, and made a run for it upstairs. We arrived in the dormitory without being detected by anybody but Ellis, who only ventured on a feeble remonstrance. The towels were duly put back in their places, and afterwards some of us spent half-an-hour in trying to convince Mrs Bramble that old age and infirmity had deprived her of the use of her senses.





## CHAPTER IV.

### THE NEW BOY.

**O**N the very first day of the half, the reader was specially introduced to a new fellow, called Dunnismore. I should like to say a few words about this boy, as he is to play rather an important part in my story. He was very small, and said he was only twelve, but I believe he was older. At all events, he was uncommonly sharp for a fellow of that age, and though he did as little work as he could, managed to do well enough to satisfy his masters. He went in for being a favourite, and nature seemed to have generously furnished him with all the requisites for playing this part well. He was pretty and gentlemanly looking, and had very pleasing manners, when he chose to put them on ;—which he always did choose when he thought there was anything to be gained by it. The most savage member of the dominie tribe could scarcely fail to be softened as he looked into that smooth, smiling face, and saw there a frank and respectful expression which always seemed to say—"I am so good, and honest, and obedient ; surely there is no need of being hard upon me !"

Mrs Pearson, too, was wonderfully taken by the boy's curly hair, and neat dress, and civil ways. The good lady was rather too fond of having favourites, and these were the points of excellence which she looked for in a boy. With some of the other fellows, too, Dunnismore was not long in getting intimate. It has already been shown how he didn't mope about in a corner like some new boys, nor did he brag and thrust himself upon public notice like others; but he seemed to be at once quite at home, and took his place among us in a quiet, self-possessed way, that conciliated the good opinion of his new companions.

On the second Sunday, I think it was, of the half, I was amused to see Dunnismore and Phillips sitting next each other in the Minster, and exhibiting, as far as they could under the circumstances, all the symptoms of an ardent schoolboy friendship. I was amused, because I could not help thinking of my own debut at Whitminster, and how Phillips sought me out, and how we swore eternal friendship in a day or so; and how we walked about with our arms round each other's necks; and how we called one another by our Christian names; and how it lasted for a week or so; and how we had a desperate quarrel, and wouldn't speak to each other; and how this fit of coldness passed away as soon as the hot one, and we became and remained friendly comrades in a prosaic, common-place sort of way, for Miss Jemima wasn't a bad sort of fellow after all. Instead of listening to the sermon, I am afraid I was wondering how long this spirit of affection would last, and how the quarrel between Damon and Pythias would come about this time. Dunnismore was listening to the sermon, though; at least he had his eyes fixed very attentively and reverently on Mr Dalton, who was the preacher that morning; and as



a ray of purple light from one of the stained windows fell upon his face, it seemed to have a fine glow of juvenile saintliness, that must have been much admired by Mrs Pearson and other female members of the congregation. This amused me, too ; for though we boys had not yet pronounced a decided opinion upon Dunnismore's moral character, as judged according to our standard, we had seen enough of him to know that he was not a very well-behaved youth from the masters' point of view. No more was I, for I must needs nudge Kennedy in church, and draw his attention to Dunnismore's edifying air and attitude.

"He wants to get into the choir, I believe, and he thinks he can come over old Dalton by looking pious," whispered George. "I don't like that fellow."

"How long will Jemima—?" I was beginning, when I caught Mr Willoughby's eye fixed reproachfully upon me, and stopped short, in my turn making an effort to look pious and attentive. And if any readers are shocked to hear that I, and the boy whom I thought the finest fellow in the world, misbehaved to such an extent in church, I beg to remind them that I have undertaken to describe boys as they are, and not as they ought to be. What would they say if I told them how Phillips used to smirk, and give himself airs, and arrange his necktie in the Minster? There was a period in Miss Jemima's school life when he fondly imagined that all the ladies in the town took an interest in his personal appearance, and went the length of believing and even asserting that one of the Dean's daughters was inspired by a still more tender feeling towards him. Poor Phillips was terribly teased about it, as you may imagine.

But Dunnismore and Phillips did not go to the Minster

that afternoon with the rest of us. Perhaps Phillips was disgusted because Miss Dean would not even once look his way and observe with what care he had brushed his hair and displayed his watch-chain; perhaps Dunnismore had had enough of devotion in the morning to last all day. At all events, they both had bad colds, and got leave from Mrs Bramble to stay away from church in the afternoon. Far be it from me to say that these colds were not very bad. All I know is, that some of us, especially the little fellows, were accustomed frequently to relapse into a delicate state of health on cold Sundays, though the number of such complaints had been for a time wonderfully lessened by an ordinance of Mr Vialls, that whoever was not well enough to go to church on Sunday, should also be held in too weak a state of health to go into the playground for two or three days after. This regulation had fallen into disuse since Mr Vialls' departure; so, when every one had gone to church except Mrs Pearson, who was asleep over a volume of sermons in her parlour, our friends Phillips and Dunnismore stayed at home. Finding themselves alone, they conceived that the close air of the matron's room was not good for their complaint, and sauntered forth into the little playground behind the schoolhouse, to enjoy the bracing east winds of a February afternoon, which, as every one knows, is the best thing possible for colds, and sore throats, and all such maladies; better, at all events, Phillips said, than sitting in the draughty Minster.

Adjoining this playground there was a small yard, which formed part of Mrs Pearson's private domains, and was used for keeping poultry. The old lady was a great poultry fancier. Moreover, it was inhabited by two or three pet poodle dogs of hers, whose lives we rendered a

misery to them during the yearly period when pea shooting was fashionable among us—to wit, the end of the autumn half, if I am not mistaken. In a shed in the corner stood the bath-chair in which old doctor Pearson had been moved about towards the end of his life, and another shed was given up to the gardener. By rights we were not allowed to go into this yard ; but as there was not much chance of detection, and as it was only separated from our playground by a close paling of tarred boards about six feet high, why ——!

Through this paling Dunnismore was peeping that Sunday afternoon, and saw something that excited a lively interest in his mind.

“I say, Phillips, look here. Some hen has been laying a lot of eggs here.”

“Half-a-dozen, I declare,” said Phillips, taking a peep. “What a fool she was to put them where nobody would find them !”

“Haven’t we found them? I say, let’s cut over and bag them. Nobody will ever know.”

“Oh, no !” said Phillips, uneasily.

“Why not, man? Are you afraid?”

“I don’t like to spoil my best trousers,” said Phillips, giving the first excuse that came into his head.

“That’s stuff. I’ll go over, if you’ll stand here and keep ‘cave.’ There is sure to be nobody about just now. You don’t think there’s any harm in it, do you? I am sure a fellow needn’t think much of bagging an egg, and these ones will only get rotten if we don’t take them.”

“I don’t want any eggs.”

“Yes, you do. You know you were saying what a pity it was you had not bought something for tea to-night. Look here, Phillips. If we don’t take them, some other fellow

will. We needn't take them all; just one or two. Why, man, I didn't think you were such a muff. Give me a leg over. I'm not going to lose such a chance, anyhow."

Phillips unwillingly gave in, and tried to hide his unwillingness from Dunnismore, lest he should think it cowardliness. So it was, partly, and partly a feeling of dislike for what boys emphatically call "bagging," which, in plainer English, is stealing. At all events, he helped Dunnismore over the wall, and stood waiting anxiously for his return, looking round in every direction, and starting at the slightest sound, though he ought to have known that no one was likely to interrupt them at that hour. He was very much relieved when Dunnismore returned in safety.

"I have only taken four," he said. "We'll have one each for tea to-night, and one each to-morrow night, and nobody will be any the wiser. Come along, Jemima, and I'll lock them up in my play-box."

So that evening Dunnismore and Phillips had each an egg boiled for tea, along with several more which other boys had bought for the same purpose with their Saturday's pocket-money. We know how like eggs are to eggs, so Mrs Pearson's cook was not aware that among a dozen of them for which she was requested to perform this operation she was boiling two of the rare black Cochins for which her mistress had just paid a shilling a piece! The cook was very good-natured in this way, and we often availed ourselves of her good nature to add something to our bread and butter at tea when we could afford it. At the beginning of a half we were in funds, and would indulge in chops, sausages, sardines, jam, and such expensive luxuries. Before long we could not afford to live in such style, and came down to a rasher of bacon or a red herring; and

after a week or two, most of us found it desirable to content ourselves with an egg, or a few radishes, perhaps, of a Saturday or Sunday evening, just to give a holiday air to these festivities.

People may ask here how I came to know what Phillips and Dunnismore were about that afternoon, when I was understood to be safely away at afternoon service. All I can say is, that I have found I shall never get on with my story if I am not to be allowed to narrate scenes at which I could not have been present. Some months afterwards, we all came to know what had happened that afternoon, and I thought I might as well tell you at once. Don't forget it, as you are likely to do, for it led to something of much more importance than you may suppose.

Mrs Pearson heard through Mrs Bramble of the indisposition of Masters Phillips and Dunnismore, and as a mark of sympathy she asked them both to tea next evening. This was an honour not often granted to most of the boys, to the common herd of us who dirtied our boots and didn't brush our hair carefully ; but nice young men like Phillips, as you know, were favourites. So these two went into the parlour, and had toast and buns and strawberry jam ; and small blame to them, if they were so lucky. And when these delicacies had been disposed of, Mrs Pearson invited them to draw their chairs to the fire, and proceeded to turn the conversation in a most astonishing and unpleasant direction.

"I want to tell you two," she said, "of a thing which has annoyed me very much." "Do you know I bought six black Cochin eggs on Saturday, and gave a shilling a piece for them? I meant to have them put under one of my hens, but the cook was stupid enough to leave them lying in the

garden on Saturday, and when she remembered about them, she only found two. Some of the boys must have stolen the rest. It is very provoking, I assure you."

Phillips and Dunnismore looked hard into the fire and said nothing.

"You can't think what trouble I had getting them, and I don't know that I shall be able to get any others. Isn't it provoking?"

"Very," said Dunnismore, sympathetically. "But I think you must be mistaken, ma'am. I don't believe any of the boys would have taken them."

"Ah, you have just come to this school, and you don't know them so well as I do," said Mrs Pearson, sagely. "We have some very nice boys, I am glad to say, but many of them are very rough and ungentlemanly, and quite capable of doing anything of the sort."

"But surely they wouldn't steal *your* eggs," cried Dunnismore. "Do you think they would, Phillips?"

"N—no," mumbled Phillips.

"But it looks very like it. I can trust my servants thoroughly, and no one is ever in that yard except them and the boys, who are always climbing over for their balls, I see. They didn't venture to do it when Mr Vialls was in the way, I know. Cook tells me she boiled several eggs for some of the boys, both on Saturday and Sunday, but she can't remember who they were. Jane saw two or three of them climbing the paling on Saturday afternoon. It looks very suspicious, does it not? I shall speak to Mr Willoughby, and see if he can't find out for me. It is really disgraceful, when the boys are treated so well here, too!"

"It is a shame, if any of the boys have done it," said Dunnismore, gravely.

"Well, I know I can trust you two. Now, if you find out anything that makes you suspect any one of the boys, you will let me know, won't you? I can't bear the idea of having a thief in the house."

"Yes, we will, Mrs Pearson," said Dunnismore. "But I think that is the bell for preparation ringing; isn't it, Phillips? I am afraid we must say good night, madam, or Mr Willoughby will mark us late."

"Good night. I hope you will both come again soon, and have tea with me; and next time we shall choose a Sunday evening, when there are no lessons to be learned, I suppose."

So off went Mrs Pearson's guests, with smiles upon their lips, but a very uneasy feeling in their hearts. They were by no means comforted when they found that as soon as the boys had taken their places, Mr Willoughby began to speak about the same disagreeable subject.

"I am sorry," he said, "very sorry to tell you that Mrs Pearson has good reason for believing that some of you climbed into her poultry yard on Saturday evening, and took away some eggs that were lying about. I may as well use the unpleasant word *stole*, at once, though I should very much prefer to be able to treat it as an act of mere mischief. I am told that this is not the first time that such a thing has been done, and I very much regret that the tone of feeling among yourselves is not high enough to put an effectual stop to these disgraceful practices. I fear some of you may look upon an act of this kind as a joke, but I earnestly trust that I may be able to convince you how wicked and dangerous such a sin is, as all sin is. For the future, I shall treat anything of the sort with the utmost severity; this time I will consider thoughtlessness as chiefly to blame, and if a

frank confession is made, I will inflict only a nominal punishment, trusting that your own good feeling as Christian boys and English gentlemen, will henceforth lead you to hold such acts in the scorn which they deserve. Stand up, the boy who took these eggs."

We all looked at each other inquiringly, but nobody moved. Mr Willoughby repeated his order, but as no one stood up, he went on, speaking not angrily, but in a tone which showed he was deeply pained.

"I hope there is some mistake in this case. I hope I shall never find that any of you has committed this mean action; but if I do find that it is so, I warn the boy that he shall be punished in the severest way. Never let me hear such another charge brought against one of you. Remember that whether a thief steals little or much, he is still a thief."

The quiet voice of our new master rang out loud and clear at these indignant words, and there was a sparkle in his eye which made to wince more than one of us who was not conscious of this particular offence, but who perhaps had not always thought it necessary to be very particular about the relation of *meum* and *tuum* in small matters. For the time we were impressed by the master's earnestness, and were quite good over our lessons in consequence; but after preparation, having asked one another about the eggs, and not being able to find that anyone was known to have taken them, some of the fellows suggested that Mr Willoughby and Mrs Pearson had been in rather too great a hurry with their suspicions, and we were minded to resent the insult that had been put upon our virtue, forsooth!

"As if we would go and steal her beastly eggs!" said Abbing, who wouldn't have stuck at it for a moment, I dare say, if there were no chance of his being found out.



"I dare say the rats stole them, if they were left lying about," said Ben Cane. "I have heard of them running away with—oh! no, by-the-bye; it was tallow candles I was thinking of. But perhaps the servants laid them about somewhere, and forgot where they had put them."

"So they would, if they were such idiots as you, Balbus," said his elder brother. "My opinion is that I never heard such a row about so little in all my life."

This sort of talk went on round the great fire in the schoolroom, where most of us had gathered, our custom always of an evening in winter. But two boys had chosen the coldness and darkness of the lavatory in which to discuss the matter.

"Don't, Jemima; for goodness sake, don't! Why, man, you needn't be afraid of any one finding out; and surely none of the fellows would tell, even if they did know."

"Hush, don't speak so loud! It would be far better to go and tell at once, and we should get off much easier."

"No, we shouldn't—not a bit. Masters always say that sort of thing, but they don't take me in so easily."

"What fools we were! I wish we had never meddled with these eggs."

"So do I now; but who was to know there would be such a row made about it?"

"And Mrs Pearson has been so jolly to me and you, Dunnismore. I don't feel at all comfortable about it."

"Well, it won't make you more comfortable to get a licking, will it? We are sure to be in for that, at least. We can't be found out, I tell you, unless we tell on ourselves. The other eggs are in my box, and I'll get up early to-morrow and chuck them away before any of the fellows are down."

"It is sure to come out sooner or later. Hang it, Dunnismore, I do think the best way would be to tell Mrs Pearson, and say we didn't think what we were doing, or something of that sort. I am sure she wouldn't be hard on me."

"Please don't—don't be such a fool. It will be shabby if you tell, Phillips, for you will be getting me into a scrape too."

"Well, it was all your fault. I wish you had never persuaded me to have anything to do with it."

"Oh, you liar! it was your own fault. You got me to do it; at least I'll tell them so; and they'll believe it, because you are older than I am. • You idiot, don't tell! If you do, I'll—— I say, old fellow, don't be shabby, now. I'll do anything for you if you will only hold your tongue."

"Well, I won't," said Phillips, sulkily; "but you needn't try to get me into any of your scrapes again, I can tell you."

"I wouldn't have proposed it to you if I knew you were such a muff," said Dunnismore, making his way back to the schoolroom.

Nothing was found out about the eggs, and in a little while we forgot the whole matter, as such matters are forgotten. Mrs Pearson got some more black Cochins, and reared a most satisfactory brood from them. A week or two afterwards she again asked Phillips and Dunnismore to tea, and treated them very confidentially, under the impression that they were still great friends. She did not know that in the meanwhile a coolness had sprung up between these young gentlemen. Dunnismore had been exerting himself to rise in school society, and had managed to become very thick with Tom Cane, Marshall, and one or two other big fellows in the fifth form. The favour showed him by these great

people made him very cocky, and he permitted himself to say in full playground that *Jemima* was a baby. To this proposition Phillips was so far from agreeing that he waxed wroth, and declared that he would lick the author of it ; but somehow or other he must have found reason to change his mind, for he took no further steps in the matter, so far as I know, not even though *Dunnismore*, growing bold by impunity, still further aggravated him by addressing him as "*Joe*." Phillips' Christian names were *Joseph Alwyn*, but he had dropped the *Joseph* when he began to discover what an interesting and polite youth he was, and to be called "*Joe*" disgusted him even more than his commoner sobriquet of "*Jemima Anne*." *Joe*, indeed ! What a name for a nice young gentleman with a talent for brushing his hair and writing verses.

At all events *Mr J. Alwyn Phillips* never finished a poetical address to *Dunnismore*, which, in the warmth of his new affection, he had begun to write. This was a pity, for the composition promised to be very fine.

"My friend, my friend, my darling friend !  
My own beloved boy !  
To see thy face, to hear thy voice,  
Is joy, is joy, is joy !

"How I delight to sport with thee,  
And link thy arm in mine !  
For I have given you all my heart,  
And you have given me thine !

"And we have sworn that we will be  
For ever faithful friends,  
For ever and for evermore,  
Until——"

Unfortunately the rupture between these sworn allies

began while the youthful poet was still puzzling his brains how to bring into his metre something about "life ends," to rhyme with "friends." So, *cetera desunt*. But having myself dabbled in amateur verse-making, I may guess that he would probably have managed it thus—

"Until existence ends."





## CHAPTER V.

### THE SORROWS OF GEORGE KENNEDY.

**N**O! We soon found out that we were not to get on so pleasantly with our new master as some of us had hoped. Every day he seemed to get more and more alive to our tricks, and he was terribly strict in a way about keeping rules. He didn't punish much, but he was always finding out some thing or other that was not according to rule, and then he would make such a work, and lecture about it for ever so long in his quiet, civil way, and many of us were more provoked by this constant "jawing," as we called it, than we should have been if he had given us a thrashing and had done with it. Then, if he did punish a fellow, he seemed to require some time to think over it, as if he were nervously anxious not to be unjust, and though the punishment was generally very slight when it did come, the suspense made it doubly annoying. Mr Willoughby was rather laughed at, and yet became more powerful and more unpopular every day. We even began to look back with regret to Mr Vials, distance lending to our view of his *regime* an enchantment which it

had never possessed in our eyes so long as it was present with us. This is always the way both with men and boys. We look back wistfully to some golden age, some consulship of Plancus, some good old days of King Somebody the Great, and murmur that then we were happy and prosperous, and forget that then too we were grumbling after a former state of perfection. It is only when Jupiter oppresses us that we bethink ourselves what a jolly fellow Saturn was, and how well we got on with him.

Our new master, Edwyn Phillip, as we had begun to call him for want of a better nickname, gave himself a great deal of trouble by his love of appealing to our reason, which so provoked some of us, and so amused others. There were boys who were quite ready to discuss with him till he was out of breath. I believe Abbing was born an Old Bailey barrister, and his talent for argument was wonderfully sharpened by contact with Mr Willoughby. For instance, here is the sort of scene which would often occur :

We are sitting at breakfast one morning, and some fellows, to whose wide throats and sound teeth breakfast is a matter of three minutes, are very anxious to be off. It is etiquette, however, that we keep our places till the master turns to the senior boy and gives him a nod, being supposed, moreover, to utter the magic word *licet*, at which half the boys rush off, and there is a hot race to get possession of the two fives'-courts outside. Some young gentlemen are continuing their meal in a leisurely and dignified fashion, being probably the happy possessors of pots of marmalade, hams, or other home-sent dainties. Some diligent or fearful youths are taking another look at their lessons, washing down an irregular verb with every sip of coffee, or digesting a proposition of Euclid along with a slice of bread and butter. The

rest, cap in hand perhaps, and with one leg thrown over the form, are eagerly expecting the signal of release, or are fidgeting about and engaging in the occupation which is proverbially available for all idle hands to do. Balbus is cutting holes in the table cloth with one of his darling knives, and pursues this useful labour with a placid smile on his honest face, all unconscious that Lessing is filling his pocket with bread crumbs; Dunnismore is helping himself to an extra spoonful of sugar while the matron's back is turned; Marshall is meaningly shaking his fist at a terrified small boy who has dared to help himself to the best piece of bread before passing the plate up to his royal highness; George Kennedy is stretching behind me to pinch Beesley; and Abbing is indulging in the intellectual amusement of throwing pieces of crust across the table. To him Mr Willoughby, who is uneasily looking on from the head of the table:

"Abbing! Surely you forget! Come here and speak to me."

Abbing was taking up a fresh piece of crust from a little magazine of them which he had collected on his plate; but on hearing this summons he let it drop, and very dexterously contrived to overturn the plate and throw his ammunition underneath the table.

"Me, sir!" he said, in a tone of great surprise.

"Yes. Come here, please."

Abbing walked up to the head of the table and stood before the master with his most innocent countenance on.

"Were you not throwing pieces of bread across the table, just now?"

Abbing paused a moment as if he were trying to recollect, and then said—

"Yes, sir. I think I was throwing one or two."

"Do you think that is a very gentlemanly way of behaving at table?"

"I didn't think there was any harm in it, sir."

"Did you not know that I had forbidden it?"

"Did you, sir? I don't remember."

"Is it possible that you could not have heard me speak to another boy about it yesterday at breakfast, and desire that it should not happen again?"

"Perhaps it was after I had left the table that you spoke, sir," suggested Abbing, very civilly.

"No; you were all present."

"Oh, I remember now!" cried Abbing, as if a new light had broken in upon him. "You said that we were not to throw pieces of bread; but I thought you meant we weren't to pitch slices to each other. I was only throwing one or two crumbs."

Mr Willoughby saw a smile on the faces of some of the boys, and I dare say he felt that he was being humbugged; but he kept his temper and went on in the same quiet tone—

"I said that you were not to throw *anything* about, I think."

"Well, I am very sorry, sir; I didn't understand you. Besides, you said *at* breakfast, and I thought we might do it when we had finished our breakfast."

For a moment Mr Willoughby was staggered, either by the ingenuity or by the impudence of this. But he returned to the charge, and there was just the slightest change in his manner which Master Abbing ought to have been cunning enough to observe and take warning by.

"You must have known what I meant; and I am afraid,



Abbing, you are not quite straightforward in making these ridiculous excuses."

"Well, I'm sure I didn't know there was any harm in it," declared Abbing, with a touch of virtuous indignation in his voice.

"Surely you must understand that these practices are not usual at—at—at breakfast tables. Because you are schoolboys, I hope you are none the less gentlemen. I should have thought it unnecessary to convince you of this."

"I didn't know it was ungentlemanly, sir."

"Abbing, you—do you mean to say that you are allowed at home to throw pieces of bread across the table at your brothers?"

"I haven't got any brothers, sir," said Abbing, coolly.

This was rather too much, and Mr Willoughby was provoked into putting an end to the discussion.

"You have disobeyed me, and must take the consequences," he said, sharply. "Come to my room after breakfast. I will think the matter over and tell you what your punishment will be. I am sorry you should try to escape it by talking in this silly and impertinent way."

At this point Phillips stood up, and said rather nervously—

"It was my fault, I think, sir. I threw at Abbing first, and then he threw back at me."

Mr Willoughby seemed very much pleased by this confession, and his fit of mild anger against Abbing passed away.

"I am glad to find that some of you have enough self-respect and courage not to shrink from punishment when you have deserved it," he said; and Jemima began to blush and look modest at the compliment. "As you have behaved so honourably I will take no notice of this affair,

but I certainly will punish the next boy who misbehaves in this way."

We were now allowed to go, and as we jostled through the doorway George Kennedy growled in my ear—

"What a stupid Edwyn Phillip is! He's always *going* to do something dreadful. Why doesn't he do it, and not talk so much about it?"

George wouldn't have called for vigorous proceedings on the part of the executive if he had known what was to take place at dinner that very day. It was pudding day, as Abbing remarked more than once, with a greasy grin of satisfaction on his countenance, and when the pudding appeared in the popular form of apple tarts, there was a general exchange of looks of approval along the whole table, except among such of the elder boys as felt it beneath their dignity thus to offend against the *nil admirari* precepts of modern society. I believe I was the only fellow in the house who didn't like apple tart. For years I had a strange and unaccountable dislike to it; and on this occasion I gave my plateful to Kennedy, who was by no means above accepting it, and as a preliminary step towards enjoying himself therewith, desired some one to pass him a sugar bowl which was circulating in the neighbourhood. It was shoved across to him, but on the road Dunnismore intercepted it and tried to take it away to the other side of the table. George grabbed at it in turn, and there ensued an unseemly contest between these two, which ended in the bowl coming in two and its contents being spilt over the table cloth. And unfortunately Mr Willoughby witnessed this catastrophe and at once called them to account.

"It wasn't my fault, sir," said Dunnismore. "Kennedy was trying to snatch it out of my hands."

"Well, it was being passed to me, and you had no business to take it," cried George.

Mr Willoughby looked puzzled over the decision of this case, but he was annoyed, and allowed himself to give rather a hasty judgment.

"I really must punish one of you," he said. "Half the complaints that I have had to make of you boys, arise from greediness, and I must do something to make you behave yourselves with outward propriety at least, if you have no sense of shame. It was only this morning that I warned you all of the way in which I should treat any case of misconduct at table, and you know I cannot break my word. I am not sure whether you two are not both to blame; but Kennedy, I think, is most so. Besides, Dunnismore has always seemed to me to behave well, whereas I have seen you, Kennedy, making a disturbance at dinner more than once. I think it must have been your fault. You will go to detention all this afternoon, please, and I do hope that I shall not be obliged to make such an example again."

This was the severest punishment Mr Willoughby had given, and it was a severe one. That day was a saint's day, and the boys who were not detained, might go anywhere they pleased in the afternoon, till the time came for attending evening service at the Minster. And it was one of these bright warm days of early spring, which so pleasantly suggest a brisk walk into the country, and inspire one with double hatred for the confinement of dusty school-rooms. Poor George! He went on eating his tart, and trying to look as if he did not care; but I knew from the expression of his face that he was very angry. So did Dunnismore, I suppose, for he took good care to hurry off

from the dinner table and get out of George's way without a moment's delay.

Kennedy was not alone in misfortune. About a dozen of us were detained for various offences, among them myself. Almost as soon as we left the dinner table, it behoved us to set out again for the school, there to undergo, some one, and some two hours of hateful imprisonment. I had expected to walk down with George, and to comfort him by assurances of my sympathy, and to tell him what a shame I thought it was, and to agree with him that Dunnismore was a sneak and Mr Willoughby a fool. But he gave us all the slip, getting off before the rest ; and when we presented ourselves in the large schoolroom we found him already sitting at his desk, looking as black as thunder and mending a pen in a very savage manner. Mr Williamson, who was keeping detention, was not long in noticing him ; and with the intention of cheering him up, I suppose, went and patted him on the head and said—

“Come sit thee down upon this wooden bench,  
While I thy amiable cheeks do coy,  
And stick musk roses in thy sleek, smooth head,  
And kiss thy fair, large ears, my gentle boy !”

George did not thoroughly perceive the allusion, but he understood that he was being compared to a donkey ; and when in these fits he hated to be meddled with, so he pushed Mr Williamson's hand away quite rudely, and, without saying a word, pretended to be absorbed in a proposition of Euclid.

“Why, I want to comfort you,” said Mr Williamson ; “but you are such a tender ass, that if one do but tickle you, you must scratch,” and with that he moved away,

leaving poor George in a great fume, all the more so that he saw two or three boys laughing at him.

I am afraid not much progress was made with the proposition of Euclid on which Kennedy seemed so intent. Most likely he was thinking more of punching Dunnismore's head than of measuring the square of the hypotheneuse. But he never raised his head from the book till the end of the first hour, when Mr Williamson left and was relieved by Mr Willoughby.

One of the new master's peculiarities when he first came was that he really seemed to be quite unhappy over every punishment which he inflicted. Lessing said that he always wanted to beg pardon of any fellow who had got into a scrape, and this wasn't far from the truth. On the present occasion, as soon as the other master had gone, Mr Willoughby went up to George Kennedy, and spoke to him kindly, asking if he could help him in his work and so forth, just as if in so many words he was apologising for having been obliged to keep him in. But George did not at all appreciate these friendly intentions, meeting his advances by sullen looks and short surly answers, and pretending to be still deeply immersed in study. By this time, however, he was tired of staring at a book, and presently, when the master had settled down in his desk, George began first to fidget and then to go in for a little reckless misbehaviour. By way of opening fire, he must needs bang the lid of his desk a little, just loud enough to be heard all over the room.

"Kennedy!" said the master.

George looked up, and coolly took a long and steady stare at him, to which Mr Willoughby only replied by a reproachful glance and turned away his eyes. But in a few

minutes he could not help seeing that George was sticking a penknife into a map that hung on the wall beside him, and again spoke to him.

"Leave that map alone, Kennedy. If you don't keep quiet and go on with your work I shall have to punish you."

George indulged in a scornful smile at this threat, and after sitting still for a little, began to throw split peas at me.

Mr Willoughby looked at him once or twice, but George would take no warning, and went on till he forced the master to carry out his threat.

"Come here," he said, taking a cane out of the drawer, and George walked up to the desk in a very jaunty way, while we looked on with great interest, for it was the first time the new master had caned a boy in the school.

The performance was not very exciting, though. George was told to hold out his hand, and had three slight cuts on it. He did not move, and kept on holding out his hand by way of bravado till Mr Willoughby told him to go to his seat, when he walked back with the same defiant air, but looking more wrathful than ever.

His skin was really not hurt much, but his feelings were. Shame has a good deal to do with habit. At one school the birch is thought a great indignity; at another, where custom hath made this infliction a property of as much easiness as is possible under the circumstances, the cane is looked upon as shameful. Now, at Whitminster no fellow felt himself disgraced by the mere fact of his having a thrashing; but when a boy got to a certain stage in the school, he would consider it to be beneath his dignity to be caned on the hands, for so had the Mrs Grundy of his little

world instructed him. George Kennedy's form had been understood to be secure from this humiliation, and probably without intending it, Mr Willoughby had deeply wounded his pride. He was effectually quieted now, and applied himself to his book again, covering his face with his hands, and haughtily refusing to notice the grins and glances with which we all endeavoured to express our interest in his affliction.

I have often known a caning act as a sort of lightning conductor to George's fits of wrath, but no such result followed this time. The clouds only grew blacker. The illustrious George Kennedy had been caned on the hands like a small boy, and was nursing his mighty wrath. We respected the sorrows of his great soul, and offered no more marks of condolence. Mr Willoughby glanced at him several times, and looked perfectly miserable about the matter, but he did not speak to George again, and in solitary state the injured one chewed the cud of his bitter indignation till four o'clock came and we were all marched into the Minster.

During the service George didn't seem to get any better. I knew by the fierce and fervent way in which he joined in the responses that he was in a great rage, but I did not guess how great his rage was, and was foolish enough to add fuel to the flames. When we got out of the Minster I took his arm, and before we had gone half a dozen steps I must needs allude to that unlucky and undignified caning.

"Well, you needn't be talking about it for ever!" snapped he.

"I am sure I haven't talked about it at all yet," said I.

"Then why can't you hold your tongue about it now? I'm not such a baby as to care for him and his canings as

you would do," and George roughly shook me off, and ran on, leaving me much disturbed in mind. It was my first quarrel with him this half. I had intended to have no quarrels with him, but who could have dreamt that he would have flown out at such a trifle! And it was very hard that he should be angry with me when I had been so sorry for him, and had been wishing all the afternoon to do something to show my sympathy for him. One comfort was that it surely would not last long.

When I got to the schoolhouse, I found some of the fellows proposing to have a game at football. George was standing apart, still refusing to be comforted, and scarcely answering any one who spoke to him; but he allowed himself to be persuaded to forget his private sorrows for the public weal, and to join the game. Poor George!

I can't help smiling when I recall the scowl which he turned upon the ball when it was brought out, and the woe-begone air with which he made an effort to rouse himself and take a drop kick.

Except in minute particulars, known only to the initiated, one game of cricket or football is so like another, that for the most part I have eschewed all descriptions of such. But I should like to have a whole chapter, and a whole afternoon to spare, that I might sing of the glories of football, and celebrate a match after the style of the combats in Virgil. Surely there is no game like it!—none in which courage, strength, and skill are called forth in an equal degree. No time in it for dawdling, every moment you must be on the look out, and can have a chance of distinguishing yourself; not a moment wasted, you can pack a hard day's work into a couple of hours. Nothing so good for driving away trouble. Black Care, with a cockade in



his hat, rides in Rotten Row daily, but he skulks off out of a scrimmage before the goals. Biliousness, ill-temper, laziness, get kicked off the field. The schoolboy playing football soars above the evils of life, and can laugh and shout as if his frost-bitten playground were a very garden of Eden. To be able to snap one's fingers at "the bleak winds of March," what greater privilege could be sighed for by mankind? Happy boys, if they only knew their own blessings!

So were thinking, perhaps, an old gentleman and a delicate-looking young lady wrapped in furs, who stood looking on at our game that afternoon, till the east wind above hinted at sent them shivering on their slow way. And, without thinking much about it, we were enjoying ourselves thoroughly. Some weak-minded youths, wrapped up in overcoats and munching apples, stood inactive in goal, but most of us were rushing about and making the best of our hour of play. Plenty of zeal there was; and if a scientific player would have been horrified at our want of discipline, a student of human nature would have been equally amused by the way in which the various characters of the boys came plainly out. Some were quiet and cool and always ready; some were almost as effective and more noisy; some were noisy and useless. It was great fun to see Abbing hovering on the skirts of a crowd, in the middle of which the ball was being fiercely fought for, and shouting out—

"Kick it out! Why don't you kick it out? Knock him over, Kennedy! Kick it here, can't you!"

This was easier said than done, for the ball was shut up in a confused knot of legs and arms, and every moment added one to the number of forms that were sprawling on the ground. But, hark! the cry is, Marshall! and lo, with haste and wrath, comes the great captain of the house, and

drives into the struggling mass with such force as to shoot the ball forth, and himself to embrace his mother earth, dragging greater ruin with him. Ere he can rise, Balbus from our second ranks has puffed towards the ball, and sent it spinning forwards, not wisely, but too well.

"Oh, you fool!" roars Abbing; "right in front of the goal!" And these reproaches are loudly echoed from all our side, for Balbus is a sort of scapegoat whom everybody feels at liberty to blame.

"It will be your fault if they get a goal," says Abbing to him, with a scowl; and then rushes off in rear of the advancing foe.

For they have been swift to perceive their advantage, and to follow it up. Like as a tawny bull, which when, feeding in green pastures, it perchance has seen the red shawl of an unprotected damsel, rushes on, and greatly bellowing, spurns the earth with lowered horns, while the fair maid screams and attracts the attention of the interesting and gallant youth who, of course, happens to be on the other side of the hedge,—even thus does Marshall speed forth, and once more drives the yielding ball through the obedient air. Him follow closely two warriors of prowess—stout Goodall and wary Beesley—while Tom Cane guards his flanks, and aids him to overwhelm the scattered foe. With shouts our leaders hurry up; but, arriving singly or too late, only bite the dust before him, or grace his triumph, following in his train. Down goes Lessing; Phillips, trembling, shrinks from the encounter; Smith staggers back, repelled by the watchful Cane; Marshall seems to have the game at his feet. Our goal lies open before him; already he measures it with his eye, and meditates the final kick, when a small new boy, called Lewis, hitherto remarkable for nothing but having his

hands and face always covered with ink, suddenly runs forward, and offers himself to meet this Goliath. Marshall presses on with a scornful smile, and condescends not to turn aside; but no more does the small hero swerve. They meet; young Lewis spins backward, falls, and rolls twice over; but not in vain. At the moment of the shock, the ball slipped away from Marshall, and with a clever kick Hopkins sent it flying over his head. We breathed again.

"Well done, Lewis!" and the new boy staggers up, half stunned, but unutterably proud and delighted. In one glorious moment he has made himself a reputation. Some good-natured fellow stops to ask if he is hurt, but the rest rush on, and press where Marshall's blue cap and red face shine amidst the thick of the fray.

Against him, in the middle of the battle, exults George Kennedy, now thoroughly warm to the work, with his collar half torn off and his yellow hair flying in the breeze. Like thunder clouds these two fling themselves here and there, bearing downfall and dismay with them, and dealing forth bruises on the shins of those opposing. Twice, under their auspices, the tide of battle rolls back from goal to goal; twice we are roused to desperate efforts, and twice our hopes revive; twice we press hard upon the foe and charge close up to his gates. The shouts grow louder.

"Now then, Kennedy! Let Marshall have it! Oh, you funk, Phillips! Off side! Give him a kick, somebody! I say, drop the ball! No catch! Yes, it is! 'Tisn't! Put it down! Run, Lessing! Kick it, Monkey! Not in front of goal! Take it round—not to Marshall! Follow up! Oh, you fool! Well kicked, sir! Look sharp! Touch it out! Hurrah! Come on, our side."

The ball is flung in between two lines of players, who

close upon it, and once more the rival ranks, mingling, engage in close combat ; and again a furious fray takes place, out of which limp one and another wounded warrior. Abbing hovers near, and by threats and shouts encourages any small boys whom he imagines to be faint-hearted. Suddenly an opportunity is presented for distinguishing himself. The ball somehow slips out of the *mêlée* and rolls to his feet. He kicks it and follows up ; but Caius, that skilful tripper, is bearing down upon him, and he wavers.

“ Out of the road ! let me have it ! ” cries Kennedy from behind, and Abbing gladly cedes the post of honour. Then from behind speeds forth George, and drives the bounding globe forward with careful foot, dodging past Cane, tripping up Beesley, hurling down bold Goodall, who alone dares to encounter him face to face. Cheers from behind urge him on ; he has the goal straight before him ; we gather up our strength to follow his lead. But a shout bids him beware. Marshall has sped circuitously, so as to get in front of his goal. All now depends on him, for he has carelessly left it guarded only by two useless cubs, who tremble as they see the tide of war sweeping towards them, fearing not so much the foe, as the wrath of their general, if they allow themselves to be overcome.

The two doughty champions bear towards each other, the one superior in strength and size, the other in agility ; both fearless. George disdains to swerve from the attack ; they meet in full career, either recoils from the shock, Marshall staggering, George hurled back by the very force of his charge. For a moment the result was doubtful. But George steadied himself first, and sprung forwards. In vain Marshall reared his vast bulk erect, and recovered his equilibrium. One steady kick, and the ball went flying fair

through the goal posts, and a great cheer arose from our side, and drowned the ringing of the bell for lock up.

"Well kicked, Kennedy! Well kicked indeed!" was the cry from all sides, and George sniffed the incense of popular applause, and felt the proud pleasure of having deserved well of the republic, and no longer cared for the wrath and injustice of tyrant pedagogues.

"Hasn't it been a jolly game?" said he to me, as he pulled on his jacket, and walked off towards the house, with not a trace of ill-humour on his glowing face.

Then at tea he was rattling away in the highest possible spirits, and seemed quite to have forgotten that he was playing the part of injured innocent. And he forgave Mr Willoughby, and even took the trouble graciously to notify to him his forgiveness, by asking—

"Should you like to see my collection of eggs, sir? You may look at them, if you like, after preparation."





## CHAPTER VI.

### WRATH.

**O**UR Muse has ventured to sing the sublime wrath of George Kennedy, and we have seen the storm pass peacefully away, as it generally did, before the sun went down. But unfortunately the peace between George and the new master was not a permanent one. These two did not get on pleasantly with each other on first acquaintance. Mr Willoughby was determined to tighten the reins of discipline, which had been allowed to hang rather loose, and this could scarcely be an agreeable process either for him or us. George, it must be confessed, was rather unruly, and had a very bad temper. Hence these troubles.

Mr Williamson and he, on the other hand, had grown accustomed to each other and got on better. Old Paddy had a temper of his own, too; but when he gave way to this, it seldom lasted long, and if he bullied us a bit now and then, we were willing to forgive him, because he did not worry us. When he was in a good humour he could generally manage fellows like Kennedy very successfully.

If George turned crusty, and showed himself rather impudent, Mr Williamson would take as little notice of it as possible at the time ; but a day or two after, he would suddenly stop in the middle of a construing lesson and begin to talk in this fashion—

“ Oh ! by-the-bye, Kennedy, I want to tell you a story which will amuse you very much. I heard the other day of a boy at a school a long way from this who behaved in rather an odd way. One of the masters at this school is a dreadful tyrant, and one day he saw this boy idling over his work and gave him an hour's detention. It was very cruel of the master, and I don't say he was right, but the boy behaved foolishly, I think. The poor fellow was so distressed by this severity that he banged down one of his books on the desk by way of showing his displeasure. This didn't do him much good, for the bully of a master told him he must have half-an-hour more detention. Then he banged another book, and he got another half hour. It is a good thing that boys are treated so cruelly, for they might not get any more scrap of work, and look as if they were in a gown, horned, and the boy next him would say—

“ I didn't get any more and half lost my temper.”

“ Oh ! I am not so gentle and kind as you was a boy like you, Kenne-

your jacket. But this unfortunate boy who was so ill-treated, don't you think that he behaved rather foolishly?"

"Yes, sir," said George, like a man.

"So do I. And I think he ought to have made some sort of apology to the master, though he was such a beast. But, come, we musn't waste any more time in these silly tales. Go on with the lesson."

And afterwards, when the boys were dismissed, George would hang behind the rest and come up to him and say, "I'm sure I beg your pardon, Mr Williamson;" and then Paddy would laugh and give him a thump on the back, and they would be the greatest friends in the world—till the next time.

But our house-master was more earnest and less genial than Mr Williamson, and took matters of this sort in a much more serious spirit. George and he did not understand one another. Mr Willoughby, I believe, thought that this boy had made up his mind to be the leader of the opposition to him; and for his part, George simply thought Mr Willoughby "a beast." My readers have already seen enough of my friend to know that he was the sort of fellow who does whatever he undertakes to do with his whole heart. About this time he seemed to have gone in for getting into scrapes, and he plunged into this thorny pursuit with all the vigour that would have animated him in a fight or a game at football. So he was constantly coming in for Mr Willoughby's mild doses of punishment administered in large draughts of expostulation and rebuke. The punishments did not have much effect on George in the way of deterring him from disobedience, but the scoldings, kind and patient as they were, went a long way towards irritating him against the master.



One day this ill-feeling came to a head, and burst out in a way that afforded the rest of us a very exciting scene and an interesting subject of conversation. It was a half-holiday and George's birthday. The evening before, he had had a new fishing-rod and a hamper from home, and ever since he had been chock-full of spirits, and royally dispensing his dainties to great and small. One cloud came over his happiness. Not content with a supper of unusual luxury, he had smuggled a large pot of jam and some biscuits into our dormitory wherewith to regale himself and the rest of us. We enjoyed them very much, and voted George and his jam a couple of jolly good fellows; but the matron was not so well pleased when she found the sheets smeared and filled with crumbs. She complained to Mr Willoughby, and as taking eatables into the dormitories was against rule, George got a birthday present of a hundred lines to write. "Many happy returns," Lessing whispered to him. It was a nuisance, but he was prepared to bear so much philosophically; and afterwards he walked whistling into the school-room and began to play fives with a new ball against the book-case. To play with balls indoors was also forbidden, for the sake of the windows, and as ill-luck would have it, Mr Willoughby presently came into the schoolroom to speak to some fellow about his work. I believe he tried not to notice the illegal amusement in which George was indulging, but George did not see him, and went on playing, and Mr Willoughby felt that he could not allow a rule to be broken before his face.

"Kennedy, don't you know that you are not allowed to play with balls in this room?"

George looked round, put the ball in his pocket, and said nothing.

"Have you any excuse to give for breaking this rule?"

Of course, George had not an excuse, so he did not give it. Abbing would have been at no loss for half-a-dozen.

"Then I am afraid I must punish you again. You will have another imposition to do this afternoon, and I should like to speak to you in my room presently."

George bit his lips, and turned away. A minute afterwards I came into the room, and not knowing what had happened, nor noticing that the storm signal was up in George's face, I ran up to him and said—

"I say, Beesley's going to lend me his rod, and I'll go fishing with you to-day after dinner, if you like."

"I can't," said George, sharply.

"Why not?"

"Why not!" he said, raising his voice. "Oh! that old fool is going to keep me in, that's all."

I don't know that George intended to speak quite so loud, but Mr Willoughby was standing close by, and heard every word of this. He started as if he had been struck, and turned sharp round upon George, who coolly stared at him, and sat down on the edge of a table. The attention of the whole room was arrested, and we looked on in amazement, wondering what was to come of such audacity. For a minute Mr Willoughby did not speak.

"Kennedy," he said at length, "I think I heard you say something about me just now. Did you intend me to hear it?"

George gave no answer.

"Did you mean me to hear what you said?" repeated Mr Willoughby.

"Perhaps I did," said George.

From what we had seen of Mr Willoughby, we might

have expected that he would now have entered upon a long argumentative speech, by way of convincing George of his error. But it was not so. This time he came at once to the point, and treated it in a workmanlike manner which greatly raised our respect for his disciplinary prowess.

"Get off the table, and stand in a proper attitude," he said quietly, and George obeyed. "Kennedy, you must know that I have been trying to do my best to avoid dealing harshly with you boys. I have tried to appeal to your reason and your right feeling, rather than to your fears; but some of you have taken advantage of my forbearance, and you especially, though I am sure I have not been harsh or unjust to you, have done a great deal to annoy me. I have been too confident that I could convince you of the folly and uselessness of such conduct, and perhaps I have put off the use of severer measures too long. You have given me a challenge, and I have no choice but to accept it. Ellis, fetch me a cane, if you please."

Ellis left the room, and till his return there was quite a sensational pause. The rest of the boys had come to the door, and were asking one another in whispers what was the matter, and looking at George, who stood quite cool, playing with his watch-chain, and glancing out of the window. He seemed less concerned than any one present. Perhaps, though he did not show it, Mr Willoughby was more afraid than any one. When Ellis brought the cane, I thought I saw his hand tremble as he took it, but he showed quite unexpected vigour in using it.

George took his place without being told, and bore about a dozen really severe cuts without flinching, or opening his lips. He stood perfectly still, with one hand in his jacket

pocket, and twisting his chain with the other ; and when Mr Willoughby threw down the cane, he turned round and said very quietly—

“Do you know if there was a letter for me by this morning’s post, sir?”

There was a little flush on his cheek, which gave warning that all was not peaceful within, but now his voice and manner showed no signs of ill-humour. Pride had helped him to conquer his wrath for the nonce. How we all admired him at that moment ! I thought I had never seen or heard of such coolness and pluckiness ; and such was my enthusiasm that I should have been delighted if I had been called upon to suffer the same punishment, and thus get a chance of imitating the same fortitude.

As soon as Mr Willoughby left the room, we all flocked round George, and proceeded to make a hero of him. No doubt he was much gratified by this, but he affected to make light of the whole matter, and would not speak much about it, except in rather a snappish tone. He had shut off the steam, as it were, but it came fizzing and spitting out in a way which showed that it was boiling at high pressure within.

“I never saw a fellow stand a licking so well !” cried Marshall. “Never turned a hair ! Did it hurt?”

“You try it,” said George shortly.

“I’m sure I couldn’t have done it,” said Abbing.

“I hope I’m not such a baby as you.”

“It’s a shame !” declared Wood.

“Well, I cheeked him, didn’t I ! I suppose he may lick me if he likes,” replied George, as if he were resenting an insult.

“You *are* a tough fellow !” said Phillips admiringly.

"You are a donkey," said George.

"Woa! gee up, Jemima!" cried Abbing; and then there was a scuffle between these two, under cover of which George slipped away, nudging me as he passed; and we walked off to school, talking as if nothing particular had happened.

I was pretty sure that the excitement which he had repressed by a great effort had not passed away. Later in the morning it began to come out, and George was so noisy and reckless in school-time that I feared he would get into some fresh scrape. Luckily for him, however, we were with Mr Williamson all the morning, and he, when he heard what had been going on, was not willing to be hard on George. It was one of old Paddy's peculiarities that though he could be severe enough himself sometimes, he always seemed inclined to sympathise with boys who had been punished by another master, and rather encouraged us to come to him for comfort under such misfortunes, which was not very wise of him, to say the least of it. He used to say that he could not bear any one bullying us except himself. This time he only heard part of the story, and joined the boys in treating Kennedy as a martyr to Mr Willoughby's strictness, so at twelve o'clock George left school without any further punishment, but loaded to the muzzle with pride and wilfulness, and ready for the first spark of mischief that might fall upon his temper.

This came in the shape of a proposal from Marshall to pay a visit to the town. There was a fair going on, and we were always strictly prohibited from going into the town for the three days it lasted. We thought this restriction rather hard, and that day we were quite in a mood for a little disobedience; so George and I and about half-a-dozen other

fellows agreed to go ; and keeping a sharp look out for masters and other troublesome people, we made a run through some of the back streets, and gave ourselves up to half-an-hour's dissipation among the pleasures of the fair.

I don't know that these pleasures were very delightful, except in so far as they were forbidden ones. Some of us had a ride on a merry-go-round ; the others, scorning this childish sport, chose to throw away their money at the roulette tables. Marshall and Dunnismore fell into the clutches of a refined kind of thimble-rigger, and were much lightened in purse and lowered in their own estimation by the result of their dealings with him. We likewise tried our skill at shooting for nuts without much success ; and as it was George's birthday, and he had plenty of money, he treated us all to a show, wherein we saw the Fat Woman of the Himalayas and the famous Indian giant, who, the showman assured us, was the real and original Last of the Mohicans, and who proved it by dancing a war dance that looked rather like a jig, and singing a song in the Mohican language with a very strong Irish accent. The Great and Unrivalled Collection of Snakes and other venomous Reptiles, as exhibited frequently before the juvenile members of the Royal Family—Admission one penny—we were compelled to pass over from want of time, but before we left the fair and hurried home to be in time for dinner, George followed the example of the celebrated Moses by purchasing, not exactly a gross of green spectacles, but a dozen eye-glasses set with plain glass, which he bought a bargain and distributed among us. This investment was not altogether a mere caprice. Mr Willoughby was a little short-sighted, and sometimes used an eye-glass, and without meaning much

harm, George had a sort of intention to make fun of him. The joke was to try to stick these in our eyes, and strut about, imitating our master's voice and manner as far as we could ; and when Mr Willoughby arrived in the schoolroom at night to keep preparation, he unexpectedly came in for a portion of this amusing performance, which of course was not meant for his benefit at all. Somewhat disconcerted, the performers made haste to look grave, but Mr Willoughby saw very well what they were about, and turned red. If I were writing a story such as some stories one has read, I should make out our new master to have shown himself on all occasions the most patient and gentle of men, but if the truth is to be told, he seemed to be rather annoyed by this demonstration, and it was with a touch of sharpness in his tone that he ordered us to our seats.

"A little quicker, Kennedy," he said, as George dawdled before his book-shelf and laughed with Lessing, and tried to spin his dictionary on the point of his forefinger, and otherwise delayed setting to work, all, I dare say, for no particular reason. But Mr Willoughby thought that he meant to be impertinent, and certainly George did not hurry himself about going to his place after this admonition.

"Kennedy, what do you mean?" cried Mr Willoughby in a way that made everybody look up.

And George was equal to the occasion. He lounged to his seat and sat down with a lordly air of indifference, which provoked Mr Willoughby into further expostulation.

"Really, I can't allow you to treat my orders in this way. What *do* you mean, Kennedy?"

George did not answer, but he muttered something under his breath, as if he were determined to have the last word. Mr Willoughby said nothing more at the time, but when

preparation was over, he made us a little speech, which he seemed to have been preparing with great pains.

"I am very sorry to have petty disputes of this kind," he said, "but I am sure you must all see that it is impossible to carry on the discipline of a school without prompt and cheerful obedience. I am sure, also, Kennedy, that I have given no cause to you or any one else to treat me in the way some of you seem to have made up your minds to do, and if I must vindicate my authority, I shall do so effectually. Kennedy, do you not see the necessity of making me some sort of apology for your rudeness this evening?"

"I wasn't rude," said George rudely.

"I am very sorry to hear you say so, for you must know that you were. You will please write out neatly the three first odes of Horace, and show them to me to-morrow after breakfast."

George forbore to make any remark till Mr Willoughby had left the room; he did not wait another minute, however, to indulge in a scornful laugh. The master heard it and was deeply pained, but he was sick of this kind of squabbling, and took no notice. And George strode up to the fire with his hands in his pockets, and with royal dignity received the compliments of some who looked upon him as the champion of popular independence, and the chaff of others, who condoled with him in the unsympathising fashion of schoolboys. But George affected great indifference.

"I hope he doesn't think I am going to write his old lines!"

"Oh, yes!" said somebody, ironically. "You had better not try that on. Ask Lessing about it;" and then everybody laughed.

The Monkey, it must be known, had likewise fallen foul



of the new master, and had come off second best in the encounter.

Lazy Lessing wouldn't get up early enough in the morning, so, after reasoning with him to no purpose, Mr Willoughby gave him a hundred lines to write. Lessing did these most carefully upon ten small slips of paper, which he folded in ten envelopes, addressed in full to the Reverend Edwyn Phillip Willoughby, and gave up at the appointed time to the great amusement of all beholders except one. That one didn't seem to approve of such jokes, for he handed back to Lessing his manuscripts, and told him to bring the lines written upon *one* piece of paper. The Monkey's next device was equally original and equally unfortunate. He cut the edges of a newspaper and pasted them together so as to form a long roll, upon which he re-wrote the lines in the largest possible letters. We counted upon the fun of seeing him gravely unroll this document, but we were disappointed, for he was summoned to bring his imposition into the Chamber of Horrors, from which he did not emerge for two hours, having been compelled to write his imposition all over again. Lessing, very good-naturedly, acknowledged his defeat in this matter, and warned George to profit by his experience. But George scorned the idea of submission.

"You fellows think that I will do the lines, but you shall see!" he proclaimed with an air of heroic firmness, and there were not wanting unwise counsellors to applaud this determination.

I dare say George thought better of it when he had slept over the matter; but he felt that the public eye was fixed upon him, and he wasn't going to give in. And when Mr Willoughby asked for his imposition, he said bluntly that he hadn't done it.

"Why not, may I ask?"

"I don't know what it was for?"

He would have been a bold boy who durst say so much to Mr Vials. We expected an outburst, but Mr Willoughby replied very quietly, and after a pause which was perhaps more alarming than any loud and sudden anger—

"You will write this imposition because I told you to do so. When you have done it I shall be happy to discuss with you the reason which obliged me to punish you. In the meanwhile you must obey."

George didn't look as if he agreed to this proposition, but Mr Willoughby contented himself with again ordering him to show up the lines at tea time.

"I won't write one," muttered George.

I was not behind hand in the way of admiring his boldness, but I began to feel afraid that he would get into a serious scrape, and begged him to let me do the imposition for him.

"He doesn't know your writing yet, so it will be all right."

"Don't bother about the donkey," was all George's answer.

After dinner, Mr Willoughby was out walking in some fields near the schoolhouse, when he came upon Kennedy, Marshall, and one or two other fellows who were lying on the ground, engaged, I suppose, in the pleasant and healthy amusement of smoking under a damp hedge. They were not taken by surprise, and contrived to conceal all evidences of this occupation; at least Mr Willoughby took no notice of it, but as he returned their salutations, he stopped and asked Kennedy if he had done his lines.

"No, sir."

"Well, Kennedy, you had better go and set about them. If they are not done by tea time, I will double them. Go home at once."

George could not venture to disobey, and intensely disgusted, left his companions and went back to the school-house. He was not going to confess himself beaten, but now he began to wish that he saw a way of making an honourable peace. The quiet firmness of the enemy was evidently dangerous; his guns were loaded and his bayonets fixed, and there was no doubt he would open fire unless a surrender were made at the appointed time; the more George considered the odds against him, the more he wished that he had not pledged himself to resist. I, and one or two other fellows, urged him to give in; he wavered, and at length agreed to a compromise, which was not very heroic.

Two or three boys were confined to the sick room with coughs. One of these was Dunnismore, and he, either because his conscience pricked him for the share he had taken in getting George into disfavour with Mr Willoughby; or because he wanted to get into George's good graces again; or because he was a better-natured fellow than we took him for; or for all these reasons, offered to do the imposition while we were at school. After some hesitation George accepted this offer, and thus in a manner he kept his promise to the public, that he wouldn't write one line of his imposition, and at the same time saved Mr Willoughby further trouble by showing up the lines and listening patiently to a long lecture, which did not prevent him soon from getting into another scrape and having another imposition and another lecture. There was a good deal more of that sort of thing going on now than we either approved of or had been accustomed to. The enemy whom we had

at first despised, was carrying on his attack briskly, and we didn't like it.

Poor Mr Willoughby ! I think he was to be pitied. A master in his position has no easy task to perform if he attempt to do his duty thoroughly. Not only has he to be an instructor to his young charges, but their constant guide, philosopher, and friend ; moreover he has to act upon occasion as judge, executioner, policeman, legislator, banker, confessor, and legal adviser ; and he may at any time have to try his hand at surgery, or pharmacy, or nursing. But the most disagreeable part of his work is undoubtedly that derived from the perversity of young gentlemen who will not do what they are told, and have to be forced thereto, and seldom approve of the forcing process, and sometimes show their disapproval in a way that is more vexing to a master than they perhaps think.

If the work of attending to the petty particulars of order and regularity which go to make good discipline be irksome enough in a great school, where perhaps centuries have smoothed the grooves in which the machinery of government runs, and the force of law is strong enough to be kept going almost by its own momentum, and in matters of detail the labour is to some extent taken off the hands of the masters by the elder boys ; if even then, he who stands *in loco parentis* to so many healthy young animals of the male sex, feels that the pedagogic sceptre is no light burden, how uneasy must lie his head who comes to rule single-handed in a small community wherein tyranny and anarchy have held alternate sway, and sets himself to restore order and liberty together with as little violence as possible, and perhaps for his pains is called both a tyrant and a revolutionist, and can't explain his aims and methods,

but must be content to be misunderstood, and abused, and reviled; and knows that he is doing right, and fights on against opposition, and slander, and indifference; and sometimes wins in the end, and sometimes is defeated with great slaughter, or driven from his throne amid the rejoicings of the mob. Such parts are played in the miniature history of schools, too, and some such part was Mr Willoughby's when he first came among us. So I pity him when I think of what his troubles must have been. He was like a second Daniel cast into a den of lions, and to shut the mouths of some of the lions was no easy matter.

All the same, one may pity the lions a little whose mouths were being stopped after they had been allowed to roar and rampage for a time. Mr Willoughby hadn't studied the science of stopping lions' mouths. Why did he talk so much to us, and why did he worry us with that shower of little impositions? I suppose he thought this was the least barbarous means he could employ. But I don't agree with him. If Master Leo has to lose a grinder, it is no kindness to pull it so tenderly that it breaks and has to be extracted by a prolonged and irritating operation; rather one good tug, and have done with it. To my mind, impositions are the most unpleasant, and unedifying, and unwholesome, and altogether unsatisfactory form of punishment that can be devised. About the unpleasantness of it we had no doubt, at all events. *Non omnis moriar*, wrote Horace, and he was right; for through centuries he has lived to plague the minds and weary the fingers of naughty schoolboys, who only thus are in after life enabled to quote him before an admiring House of Commons. Of the sad tears and vain toils of youth, he has indeed built himself a monument more enduring than brass.

Most schoolmasters and schoolboys will agree with me, I fancy, in the character I give to this mode of punishment. Shall I tell, then, why it is so fashionable in schools now-a-days? Well, the boys of the present generation have a trick of telling tales out of school to their mammas, and it sounds so much less alarming in the nursery—but no, the real reason is that this is a humane age. We have no objection to Dr Blimber worrying a boy's health and spirits out of him with constant cramming, lecturing, scolding, snapping, snarling, and *impositioning*. All this is quite laudable, but we rightly pronounce Squeers and Solomon to have been little better than brutes in their ideas of training a child in the way he should go. Schoolboys are on no account to read the above paragraph, lest they should be led to think that their instructors are not the wisest men in the world.

George Kennedy liked impositions still less than I do, but he had them to write, as we see; and there is nothing like pen and ink for irritating any sore feelings that may exist between master and pupil. The bruises of the cane shall often heal sooner than the scratches of this apparently more harmless instrument. George's mind was raw after his contest with Mr Willoughby. He was vexed that he had clearly been got the better of, and felt that he must do some valiant deed to keep up his credit in the public eye. Marshall and Tom Cane were likewise in a rebellious frame of mind, and these three agreed, on the last day of the fair, to pay it another surreptitious visit, and did.

Their expedition was not so lucky this time, however; for, on coming out of a refreshment booth, they unexpectedly found themselves close to Mr Bentley, one of the masters, who made for them in an alarming manner. Now,

Mr Bentley was short-sighted ; moreover he had not on his spectacles, and he only thought he recognised our friends as belonging to the school, though of course they had been prudent enough to leave their treacherous trenchers at home. But conscience, we know, makes cowards of us all, and the three adventurers fled panic stricken, and did not feel themselves safe, even when they had turned the corner into the High Street.

"He's coming this way," cried George, looking round.

"Don't go up High Street. We are safe to meet one of the masters there. Let's go in to Weston's, and wait till Bentley has gone by. He'll never think of looking there for us."

This advice was approved. The three turned into a large bookseller's shop close at hand, and Marshall asked to be shown some valentines which were in the window. And before the boys had been there a minute, from a table at the back of the shop, where he had been standing out of their sight, forth came the last person they desired to see—Mr Willoughby.

Imagine the discomfiture of all three. But, according to their account, Mr Willoughby seemed quite as much put out as themselves by this unexpected *rencontre*. Lessing drew upon his imagination, and imitated the master's look of surprise, and the nervous, vexed tone in which he ordered the detected ones to go home and wait till he sent for them. They, however, were in no mood to enjoy the performance much ; for, not only had the other fellows a good laugh at their misadventure, but they gathered from Mr Willoughby's manner, that he intended, after reflection, to make a signal example of them. We were all curious to know what would be their fate ; we were sure that in the

consulship of Vials, they would have been made short work of.

They were left in suspense till tea time, when they were summoned to a judicial interview, and returned somewhat crestfallen, with the news of a novel and disagreeable sort of sentence. All three were to be confined for a fortnight to the schoolhouse grounds, except when going to school, or with special leave upon due occasion. No going into the town, no visits to the tart shops, no lounging in the High Street. Besides, for a week each of them was to give up a hundred lines every day. No wonder that Marshall felt called upon to rage against the new master in the most forcible terms of the schoolboy vocabulary, winding up with an expression of his earnest desire to punch Willoughby's head.

"Hear! hear! hear!" cried Lessing, applauding this proposal. "The performances will take place this evening at half-past seven. Price of admission to the front seats, only sixpence."

"Confound you, Monkey," growled Marshall, "if you don't shut up I'll have a rehearsal just now, and practise upon you."

"*Visne id facere nunc aut waitare usque ad you can catch me,*" replied Lessing, running away, and Marshall was obliged to work off his wrath by boxing the ears of a small boy who had taken his place by the fire, and then having a round or two at the gloves with George Kennedy, which relieved the feelings of both of them to some extent.







## CHAPTER VII.

### DISCONTENT.

**O**UR dissatisfaction with Mr Willoughby's government increased. He seemed to be getting more and more strict, and the new punishment of confining to bounds which he had introduced was very unpopular. Then a number of fellows got into scrapes about this time. I don't know if my schoolboy readers have ever noticed that naughtiness in a small school is infectious. A set of boys will be all very good for a time, and then ill-behaviour will suddenly appear and spread with great rapidity through the whole school, and rows and punishments and ill-feeling will break out all over it like measles. Some scholastic physicians have held that such a disease will be best cured by a little blue pill given, not to the boys, but the master. This could scarcely be said in Mr Willoughby's case, however. He was provokingly even-tempered. I think we should have liked him better, if he had sometimes stormed a bit like Mr Williamson.

Into such an unhealthy state had our little community fallen, and grumbling was the order of the day at Mrs

Pearson's. It was an awkward time of the year; football had gone out, and cricket had not yet come in; many of us had no regular occupation for our play hours, so we had plenty of time for grumbling. And there were not wanting subjects to grumble at. A number of boys having been complained of for not getting up their lessons properly, Mr Willoughby put on an extra half-hour's preparation, and we grumbled at that, of course. As the weather grew milder, we were obliged to get up a little sooner; this had always been the rule, and I suppose we had always grumbled, but this year we seemed lazier and sleepier than usual, and grumbled more than ever. Then we grumbled about our food. To tell the truth, we were very fairly fed at Whitminster, as schools go, but that didn't prevent us from finding fault, sometimes, perhaps, with reason, more often without. Boys are always greedy creatures, and Mr Willoughby insulted us by saying that we were the greediest set he had ever seen. Lessing wrote home to say that we had three vegetables for dinner, to wit, potatoes, cabbages, and caterpillars, and he exhibited in his study a small bottle full of the last-named vegetable, which he professed to have found among a plate of the second. Mrs Pearson came to hear of this, and was much annoyed. She vowed, we were told, that if any more silly complaints were made, she would give us salt beef for a whole week running. What else did we grumble about? I told you already, I think, that most of us were not allowed to sit in our studies at night all that quarter. At first we didn't mind so much, for the studies were rather cold, except those at the end of the passage, where there was a large fire-place; but, when March came, we began to think it a shame that we should have to learn our lessons in the schoolroom under the eye

of a master who did not read the paper like Mr Williamson, but looked about him and kept us at our oars.

One day the winter of our discontent came down to freezing point, or shall I say that the summer of our dissatisfaction rose to boiling point? We of Pearson's house were returning from a paper chase, when we passed Mr Penny's school. Mention has already been made of the feud between his pupils and the Grammar School boys. It had slumbered for some time, but on this occasion certain of the young "Coppers," mindful of the traditions of a former generation, thought proper to look over their wall and assail us with vituperative epithets. We replied with stones, and the enemy fled into their fortress almost without firing a shot. Ellis, who still made occasional attempts to exercise monitorial authority, tried to restrain our wrath, by reminding us that there would be a "row," but in vain. The fugitives appeared at their schoolroom windows and began to insult us by making faces—"cocking snooks"—oh! superfine critics, tell me a less vulgar name for this vulgar action, and I will thankfully use it—and indulging in other gestures which appeared to us singularly ill-becoming on the part of a beaten and cowardly enemy. So we broke several of their windows and knocked off the hat of their usher, who gallantly ventured to make a sortie for the purpose of expostulating. Then we ran away.

Of course Mr Penny told Mr Willoughby, and we all had a scolding and were sentenced to be confined to bounds till we had paid the damage out of our pocket money. This seemed very hard lines, seeing that the Coppers had begun. They were to be punished also, but this was very little comfort to us, for it was understood among us that

their master daren't thrash any of his boys except the very smallest, and that if he gave them an imposition, they would bring notes from their mothers to say that they weren't to do it. In view of this, we forgot the pride of our position as Grammar School boys, and fretted under the heavier yoke of servitude which was the penalty of our rank.

It was not to be put up with. Marshall took in *Reynolds' Newspaper* regularly, and he was prepared to act the part of Brutus. It was agreed to hold a great demonstration that very evening, and make the tyrant Edwyn Phillip tremble in his gilded halls. Ellis and one or two of the other big fellows wouldn't have anything to do with it, and shut themselves up in their studies, but the rest of us assembled in the schoolroom after tea and proceeded to business.

Lessing undertook to marshal a procession, which, he said, was the proper thing. He got the towels out of the lavatory and fastened them together so as to make a banner, which was tied on to a broomstick and borne round the room by a column of the small boys, to the music of paper trumpets, accompanied by the poker and tongs. The more practical of the malcontents despised these proceedings as frivolous, but the mob were greatly delighted by them and applauded loudly when Lessing mounted on one of the tables and announced his intention of making a speech :

“Friends, Romans, countrymen!—unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, lend me your ears. I am no orator as Balbus is, but on this great, this momentous, this appalling occasion, when I feel that our rights, our liberties, our constitution, our very existence is at stake, I have overcome the scruples of my natural modesty and have screwed up my courage to address the assembled multitude. Gentle-

men, it is not able to be denied that we are within a little of being utterly crushed under an insupportable load of bondage, and I am able confidently to state that in two shakes of a duck's tail we shall either be sunk to a—to a—disgusting depth of slavery, or shall have to kick up a row and put a stop to the goings on of the most infamous and unprincipled government that ever oppressed a free and enlightened people. Under these circumstances it behoves us to—it behoves us to—don't interrupt me, you fellows—it behoves us to remember the words of the Latin poet, those glorious words, which for ages have been the terror of the slave, and the comfort of the tyrant ; those words which are so familiar to you all that I won't translate them—

“ ‘ Absque, a, ab, abs et de,  
Coram, clam, cum, ex, et e,  
Tenus, sine, pro, et prae,  
Ablativum regunt hae.’ ”

“ Is there any one here who can listen to these glorious lines and——?”

“ Now, Lessing, haven't we had enough of that rubbish?” interrupted Tom Cane.

“ No, no! go on Lessing,” cried the assembled multitude ; and Lessing proceeded amid great applause.

“ My friends, need I relate to you these grievances which have forced us to assemble here to-day in defence of our liberties? Last half, you know, we enjoyed the blessings of a wise and just liberty. Every fellow who could lick other fellows, could do pretty much as he liked. This half, it is all different. There are no end of new rules, and we are looked after a great deal too strictly. The quality of the provisions, also, supplied to this establishment, has

visibly deteriorated. I blush, gentlemen, as I remind you that this honourable house has more than once been asked to eat salt butter. The beer is as flat as the table—I declare I could stand on it. Mrs Pearson puts one plum less into the puddings every Sunday. We have to work at our lessons, and go to bed soon, and submit to all sorts of cruel restrictions which I need not mention. But the worst of all is to come !” cried Lessing, once more soaring into a high flight of oratory. “There has lately been introduced among us a tyrant, a monster, a fiend in human shape. His name you all know, alas ! too well, and his nature also. We have all pined in his lash, and bled beneath his dungeons. We are all at the present moment guarded by his myrmidons, and prevented from going down the town to buy grub. Bear with me, gentlemen ; my heart is in Mrs Matthews’ shop, and I must pause till it come back to me.”

As Lessing stopped to indulge in a little theatrical emotion with a very dirty pocket-handkerchief, some one proposed “three groans for Edwyn Phillip !” which were given with great good-will, and then the orator proceeded—

“Who is this Edwyn Phillip ? I cannot tell what all you fellows think of this sort of thing, but for my single self I had as lief not be, as live to be in awe of such a thing as I myself. I was born as free as Edwyn Phillip ; so were you. We all ought to feed as well, and some of us have got as big whiskers as he has. His hat flew off one raw and gusty day, and I ran after it and fetched it back to him, and he hadn’t even the decency to let me off half-an-hour’s detention for it. This is a digression ; what I meant to say was, that this man is now become a god, and Lessing is a wretched creature, and must wag his tail, if Edwyn Phillip carelessly but nod on him. The other night at tea, I heard

him speak; ay, and that tongue of his that bids us fellows mark him, and write no end of lines in our imposition books, alas! it cried, 'give me some more sugar, Mrs Bramble,' like a sick girl. Ye gods! it doth amaze me, a man of such a feeble temper should so get the start of the majestic world, and have the impertinence to introduce among us revolutionary and unconstitutional punishments! But I am sure, gentlemen, you agree with me that this is not to be endured. We despise his threats, we defy his menaces, and we take our stand upon that glorious constitution which for countless ages has braved the battle and the breeze, and proudly declare that Britons never, NEVER, NEVER shall be slaves! (*Tremendous applause.*)

"I knew I should touch a chord in your hearts. You are not wood, you are not stones, but men, and so you won't have any more of this humbug. No, I should rather think not! Oh, by your father's cradles and by your children's graves, be men to-day, you fellows, or be for ever slaves! For this did Alfred give us laws, for this did Milton bleed! For this did Scipio die in defence of his country! For this did William Tell wave his war-cry, and shout his sword! For this did Cromwell and Hampden have their heads chopped off in the sacred name of liberty? Remembering these great names, standing on the tombs of our fathers, breathing the air which melts the shackles of the slave, rejoicing in the name of Britons, shall we, I ask, shall we be content with having pudding twice a week! I pause for a reply."

How much longer Lessing would have gone on, I don't know, but at this point, while he was waving his hand to the applauding audience, Marshall and Cane unceremoniously dragged him from the rostrum, and told him to hold his tongue.

"We don't want any more of your jaw. Let us talk seriously."

"Hear! Hear! I vote Caius takes the chair."

"Well, I will, if no other fellow will," said Tom Cane, highly pleased at this honour being conferred on him. "Now, gentlemen, we have met to consult on the best means of taking Willoughby down a peg. Has any gentlemen got any proposition to lay before the meeting?"

"Write to the *Times*," said Abbing, but withdrew the suggestion on the chairman's threatening to kick him.

"Kick up no end of rows, and worry him out of the place," growled Marshall; and then uprose Dunnismore, in act more graceful and humane.

"I don't know that there will be much use in resisting him openly. If we disobey him or cheek him he is pretty sure to get the best of it; but if we set to work cautiously, there are plenty of ways in which we can annoy him, and yet he won't be able to come down on us. At the last school I was at there was a master who was awfully hated, but we made him leave without a single fellow getting into a scrape about it. I could put you up to no end of dodges of that sort."

"You are right, I believe, Dunny," said Cane. "It won't be hard to bother a fellow like Willoughby out of his wits. What do you say, Kennedy?"

"I don't say anything," was all that George would say. He was holding aloof from the proceedings, evidently disapproving of them as unpractical.

"I'll tell you what," said Abbing, "if we go riling Edwyn Phillip, he'll get nice and waxy and make a lot of stricter rules than ever. I think you fellows had better take care what you are about."



"Good gracious! you ass, what are we to do, if we are all as great funks as you?"

"At all events," said the chairman, "we can draw up a protest against this fellow and all his new rules and punishments. He can't say anything to us for letting him know our opinion."

"Yes, but how are we to do it?"

"We ought to go and break some windows, or railings, or something," suggested Balbus. "That's what they always do in London when they want to have a reform of anything."

"Don't you make a greater fool of yourself than you are already, Ben," said his brother.

"Shall we agree then, gentlemen, to petition Mr Willoughby to keep by the old rules."

"Yes; and while we are about it, we may as well settle about punishments. In a public school no master has a right to punish fellows as he likes."

"Of course not," said Marshall. "Short impositions for the big fellows, and caning for the cubs, that's the thing."

"Oh, that's good!" cried Wood.

"Yes, it is good for you small fellows, caning is," said Marshall. "Wakens you up a bit."

"Shall we say anything about the grub?"

"Better not; that's Mother Pearson's business, and it's no good trying to come over her, is it Marshall?"

"Not a bit. But I say, we must give Willoughby a pretty strong hint that he isn't to be so beastly strict. A fellow can't smoke a cigar, or go out at night, or thrash a cheeky little brute, without that fool coming down on you. He has no right to go poking about everywhere. He ought to trust to our honour."

“Well, shall we draw up a round robin? Who will do it?”

“Stop a bit!” cried Lessing, who had been confabulating with Phillips in a corner. “Here’s the sort of thing you want. Listen,” and he read out from a large sheet of foolscap—

#### MAGNA CHARTA OF OUR RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES.

WHEREAS,—The members of this establishment have from time immemorial been in the possession of certain privileges and immunities handed down to them by the wisdom and justice of their ancestors;

AND WHEREAS, the above-mentioned privileges and immunities have been seriously encroached upon by certain tyrannous, impious, and papistical restrictions imposed by Edwyn Phillip Willoughby;

AND WHEREAS the said Edwyn Phillip Willoughby has attempted to enforce the said restrictions by novel and unconstitutional punishments;

BE IT ENACTED—That the following RESOLUTIONS, unanimously adopted at a public meeting, held in the schoolroom to-night, be henceforth considered as the basis of the constitution of this establishment.

RESOLVED, 1<sup>st</sup>, That a republican form of government be established.

2<sup>d</sup>, That the cane and all other barbarous relics of the past be abolished.

3<sup>d</sup>, That two tribunes of the people be elected every week, who shall have a veto upon all laws proposed by anybody.

4<sup>th</sup>, That no citizen shall be punished for anything, except by his own consent.

5<sup>th</sup>, That it is the duty of a master to attend to nothing but his own business.

Approved of by the Council of the Whitminster Reform Association, and given under our hand and seal.

CAIUS, *Chairman.*

L. DE MONKEYBOROUGH, *Secretary.*

JEMIMA ANNE, *Treasurer.*

There was a great laugh at this document, but Marshall bounced up in a rage—

"I declare, Lessing, you turn everything into humbug. I have a confounded good mind to give you the sweetest hiding you ever had in your life."

"And *this* is freedom?" cried Lessing, holding up his hands, and then ducking to escape a book which Marshall flung at him. "Well, what sort of paper do you want to draw up? Would you like the threatening notice style—skull and cross bones—'Hated Sir—look out next dark night—put a bullet through you'—and so forth. If that's what you are thinking of, I shall be happy to subscribe three halfpence towards a blunderbuss."

Just then Balbus was struck by another bright idea, and made haste to present it to the meeting.

"Let us have a barring out. That's what they always did in schools long ago. I vote we bag some bread from supper to-night and begin."

"Have a fiddlestick!" interrupted his brother scornfully. "Is no one going to talk any sense?"

"I'll tell you what," said George Kennedy, who had been sitting silent during this discussion: "it's all rubbish about writing petitions. We think Willoughby too strict, and if it would do any good to let him know it, we had better go and tell him straight out to his face."

"I second the motion," cried Marshall.

"*Sic ego*," said Lessing. "And now, my friends, let us proceed to consider who shall have the honour of bearding the lion in his den. 'There's the rub,' as Dr Johnson so beautifully says."

"Look here," said Cane; "don't you think it would be better to go to Mrs Pearson?"

"The very thing! I vote that the chairman be appointed as a deputation to lay our complaints before Mrs Pearson."

"Oh, no! I don't think I ought to go."

"Of course you ought. A nice fellow you are, proposing things and then backing out of them yourself."

"Well, if I do, some fellows must go with me."

"Lo, I will stand on thy right hand, and talk to Mrs Pearson with thee," said Lessing.

"Of course you will, Lessing. I believe you would go to the gallows, if you had a chance of wagging your tongue there."

"Some more volunteers! Who will dare to follow if Caius lead the way?"

"Dunnismore and Jemima are the fellows. They are no end of favourites with Mother P."

"No, we are not," protested these two young gentlemen; but public opinion was against them, and they had to agree.

"One more," cried Lessing. "We must be the Five Members, and then we'll all get sent to the Tower and have a jolly time of it."

"Well, take—let us see—Abbing!" said Marshall.

"No, I don't want to have anything to do with it," declared Abbing, modestly shrinking back from this honour.

"There's Smith would do much better than me."

"You *shall* go, or I'll give you a good licking, there now;" and Abbing allowed himself to be persuaded.

The deputation being thus formed, was sent off at once be-

fore their courage could have time to cool. A slight delay was caused by Lessing, who insisted that he was going to execution, and wanted to rehearse his last speech and confession, and then Marshall suddenly bethought him that Mr Monkey might spoil the whole affair by his fooling, so he was dismissed, and I was unceremoniously enlisted to serve in his stead.

So we five took our way towards Mrs Pearson's private parlour. We paused for a few moments outside, while we were discussing who should knock at the door, and Tom Cane was running over in his mind the heads of a speech in which he was eloquently to persuade Mrs Pearson of our grievances. Then we knocked and were told to come in.

As we had expected, we found Mrs Pearson at tea, but opposite her, in an easy chair by the fire, was sitting no less a person than Mr Willoughby. Alas for the success of our mission! I am sure we would all have given a good deal to have been able to back out of the room again.

"Well, boys, what do you want?" asked Mrs Pearson, but we were struck dumb, and looked at one another without being able to say a word. Cane's eloquence had quite deserted him, and none of the rest of us were disposed to come to his assistance.

"I suppose you have come about some complaint," said Mrs Pearson; "you ought to talk to Mr Willoughby about these things. You know I don't like you boys to come here of an evening unless I invite you—and in your dirty boots too, Abbing, I declare!"

"Can I do anything for you?" said Mr Willoughby in his polite way; and then Tom Cane took heart and plunged into the matter.

"We think, sir, at least some of the fellows say, that you

are getting to be too strict, and we wanted to—I mean we thought we should tell you——” Cane turned to us, but we modestly looked on the floor and said nothing.

“O! I suppose you are vexed about this affair to-day. Well, Cane, I am very glad to have an opportunity of talking the matter over with you, and I hope to show you that the punishment I have inflicted is not unjust. I assure you I have been very much annoyed about it myself, and if possible, considering the provocation you received, I wished to pass the matter over; but then, again, I felt the necessity of taking strong measures to put a stop to these quarrels between you and Mr Penny’s boys. I think I acted rightly; Mrs Pearson thinks so too; I have very fortunately been able to obtain Mr Dalton’s advice, and he quite agrees with me. Now, if you will listen to me——”

“It isn’t that, sir,” interrupted Cane. “I suppose we had to be punished for this thing, but you have introduced some new rules and punishments, and—and you have no right to do that.”

“Well, I never!” cried Mrs Pearson. “Who told you young gentlemen that you were to settle what punishments you were to have? That’s like the mice objecting to mouse-traps. Indeed!”

“Cane,” said Mr Willoughby, quietly, “I know very well, and am sorry to know, that you boys are dissatisfied with me. To remove this unpleasant feeling I would do anything, except one thing, that is, neglect my duty. I suppose you will admit that it is my duty to make you attend to your work and obey the rules of the house?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, when I came I found a certain amount of looseness of discipline which was no doubt owing to the fact

of your having been without a master for some time. Certain rules seemed to have fallen into disregard, and there was a good deal of idleness and disobedience which I could not allow."

"I am sure that's right," said Mrs Pearson. "There never were so many windows broken as last quarter."

"Do you agree with me that the discipline of the house was not so strict when I came as in Mr Vialls' time?"

"Y—yes," said Cane. "I mean, no—it wasn't."

"Well, I found that I must either cultivate your good opinion by failing in my duty, or undertake the somewhat odious task of putting things right. I tried to do this with as little harshness as possible. I appealed to your own good feeling and common sense; I wished to do without punishments, if I could. You know that I did, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"When I was obliged to use punishments I tried to do with very slight ones, didn't I?"

"Yes, sir," said Cane, fidgeting about under this examination.

"When I found such punishments ineffectual, I was obliged to make them more severe. I couldn't do anything else, could I? What! Was I to allow you to laugh at me?"

"No, sir."

"I have been most careful never to inflict any punishment without satisfying myself that it was deserved. I have tried not to be hasty or suspicious. I believe I have given myself a great deal of thought and trouble over very little matters of this sort, and though I know I have made mistakes, I am sure none of you can fix upon a single instance where I punished a boy from spite or passion. Can you?"

"No, sir. I don't think so."

"Then what do you complain of?"

No answer seemed likely to be forthcoming to this question. We stood looking more uneasy than ever, and it was only after a pause of two or three minutes, and a nudge or two from other members of the deputation, that Cane ventured to mutter something about this new punishment of confining fellows to bounds being unconstitutional.

"Unconstitutional!" repeated Mr Willoughby, with a slight smile. "I am sure I am very sorry if I have done anything unconstitutional. I had no idea that one punishment was more lawful than another, and I wished to use such as by effectually deterring you from disobedience would make their repetition less necessary. Whatever may be your opinion, I think quality better than quantity in these matters. If, however, you boys have a strong objection to any particular form of punishment, I should be most happy to listen to it and discuss it with you; I don't wish to be an arbitrary governor by any means. But I think such a complaint ought to be brought to me by the boys of the highest character and standing in the house, and not by—I don't wish to say anything rude, but I suppose you boys can scarcely call yourselves representatives of the school or leaders of public opinion."

We felt very foolish.

"When I think of it, I don't quite like the way you are behaving. Instead of coming and speaking out to me, I am afraid your intention was to try and prejudice Mrs Pearson against me. This is scarcely fair. I have been trying my best to introduce a proper regard for discipline, and a healthy and honest tone among you, and I assure you again, Cane, I feel very much that you should dislike me



for this reason. I know I have not been harsh ; indeed, I begin to think I have talked too much and acted too little. If you find fault with me for doing my duty, I am very sorry, but I mean to go on, and some day, perhaps, you will understand and appreciate my motives better. Preparation will be in five minutes."

"It's no use coming to me with complaints," added Mrs Pearson. "I think Mr Willoughby manages very well, and before he came you boys were getting to be past all bearing. Phillips, I didn't think you would join in such silly doings. Go away now ; and, Abbing, next time you come to my room in your dirty boots, I shall ask Mr Willoughby to send you to bed, or do something to you."

Then the great deputation backed out with its tail between its legs ; and covered with humiliation we returned to our constituents in the schoolroom.

"Bold is the task when subjects, grown too wise,  
Instruct a monarch where his error lies."

So spouted Lessing, and thus ended the proceedings of the Whitminster Reform Association.





## CHAPTER VIII.

### GETTING INTO SCRAPES.

**T**HE Baal of schoolboy life is a certain image of false manliness, which at the age of fifteen or thereabouts boys are tempted to worship. It may be seen how at that age a boy who has hitherto been sensible, and boyish, and frank, will begin to alter for the worse. He will take to wearing enormous collars, and trousers of startling pattern, and hats of the latest and most ludicrous fashion set by the attorney's clerks of the neighbourhood. He will desert the playground and spend more time in swaggering about the streets. He will grow arrogant, rebellious, resentful of reproof. Such will be but the outward signs of inward mischief. Those who have his welfare at heart may more or less clearly perceive that he looks upon himself as about to become a young man, and considers the use of bad beer, bad tobacco, and bad words as creditable and necessary to him under the circumstances. The devil has no more hateful and dangerous snare than this idea of manliness. Elders, who know where this path leads, in vain warn a lad of the risk he runs by setting

foot upon it. He laughs and presses on, confident in his strength and in the wisdom of fools of his own age, who encourage him and are encouraged by him. An angel from heaven would seem to his eyes a less trustworthy guide than Master Brown, aged fifteen, and far enough advanced in life to have been once half drunk; or Master Jones, who is acquainted with two or three real sots or spend-thrifts, and therefore may be considered to know the world. There can be no sillier or sadder sight than a boy thus bent upon sacrificing his honest and happy boyhood to this idol. We are accustomed to laugh at these beardless aspirants; surely we should rather pity them. Surely, too, is to be pitied a parent or teacher who may be condemned to stand by, almost silent and helpless, and see folly do its work, and understand what the end of that work will be, and know that for all the effect of his warnings he will be sneered at by these sapient young gentlemen as sour and spiritless. There was a time when, for George's sake, I hated Mr Willoughby as the oppressor of my friend. But then I didn't understand how a strict master might not be so much one's enemy as one supposed.

Even in these days I was not altogether easy about George. He had not gone very far on the path to which I have been alluding, but he had gone farther than I cared to follow him. He and I were not so much together now, though no quarrel had taken place between us. George had never been what you may call a model good boy, and now he got into scrapes every day, and seemed to become more reckless and to throw himself more and more into the arms of such fellows as Marshall and Dunnismore. I didn't like these boys, not so much, I am afraid, from any lively horror of their ways, as because they didn't like me.

Marshall was the greatest bully in the house, and Dunnismore I thought a spiteful and conceited imp. He had managed to get into the best society of our little world, and when he found himself a sort of favourite among certain big fellows, he held his head very high, and would scarcely condescend to have anything to say to boys of his own age and standing. His pretty smiles and pleasant ways were only for those to whom he thought it worth his while to be civil. I don't think I should have been afraid to do anything for George himself, but I wasn't going to hang on to fellows like Marshall, and let them lead me into danger of Mr Willoughby, who was becoming more and more formidable every day. So formidable, that most of the boarders, like me, grew prudent, and began to pay quite as much heed to our new master as they had done to the redoubtable Vialls himself. We had allowed ourselves to laugh at Mr Willoughby's first attempt to bridle us, but before we stopped laughing, we found that he had somehow managed to mount into the saddle, and had a very stout bit in our mouths.

George and I were less together, then, and I took up with Lessing, who was a much safer companion in these troubled times. I don't mean that the old Monkey was exactly a pattern pupil either. He was often enough in trouble with the authorities, but his scrapes were very slight ones, and he was of such a calm and philosophical temperament that misfortunes seemed to run off his mind like water off a duck's back. Those readers who have formerly made the acquaintance of my schoolboy friends, will know that Lessing wasn't very enthusiastically affectionate towards any one, but was liked by every one, and was always good humoured and comical, with his dry jokes, and burlesques, and quotations

from Shakespeare, after the manner of his friend Mr Williamson.

The scenes of schoolboy life are for the most part composed of petty incidents, and I fear by this time certain critical readers will be much disgusted with me because I have hitherto been faithfully portraying schoolboy life. But if such readers will be kind enough to skip the following pages till I announce something startling and out of the way, perhaps there are boys who may be willing to sympathise with Lessing and me in the sort of trivial troubles into which we fell every day or so.

For instance, I dip my hand by chance, as it were, into my bag of fragmentary recollections, and draw out this little incident. Scene, the large schoolroom towards the end of morning school; *dramatis personae*, Masters Lessing and Smith, who, sitting at their desks, are by way of writing a Greek exercise for Mr Willoughby. But we had been so tickled by one of Balbus's wise sayings, who, in reply to a question, had a little before informed the master that in ancient times Sparta was celebrated for the manufacture of cigars; the idea had struck Lessing so forcibly, I say, that he must needs draw a picture of Leonidas smoking a hookah and bidding Xerxes "come on," the hills of Thermopylae and the sea-shore, with a row of bathing-machines, being duly represented in the background. In this nefarious occupation I was aiding and abetting by chuckling over the sketch, and making suggestions for its improvement, when, even as the devoted Lacedaemonians were suddenly surprised by the enemy, were we taken unawares by Mr Willoughby, who, very naturally, accused us of idling over our work. If it had been Mr Williamson he would most likely have been so amused at Lessing's fun that we should have got off, but Mr Willoughby

had no appreciation of humour, at least not in school time, and we were told to stop in and copy fifty lines of Greek.

This sounds very harmless, but to understand the force of it you should know that Mr Willoughby was more particular than other masters about the impositions that were shown up to him. He gave but little of this kind of punishment, nor gave that little long, but then he insisted on the lines being written very neatly and carefully, and not scribbled off in the well known style which has ruined the writing of so many idle hands for life. As I write the present manuscript, I and my printers have great reason to be grateful to Mr Willoughby for his care in this respect; but when I was writing impositions, I did not at all appreciate it. In our wisdom we choose to imagine that to do fifty lines neatly was a worse punishment than to scribble two hundred, and highly disapproved of this innovation in discipline. So it came to pass, that from carelessness or haste, or with true schoolboy disregard of the future even when it is only half an hour off, I did not come up to Mr Willoughby's standard; and while Lessing's lines passed muster, I was told to stop in after dinner and write mine all over again.

This was annoying, especially so as I had borrowed Kennedy's fishing rod and engaged to go out with Lessing that afternoon in pursuit of such members of the finny tribe as might be weak-minded enough to be ensnared by our devices. Lessing started by himself, vainly attempting to comfort me by telling me that it was much more *beneficial* for me to write impositions than to go fishing; that if I was doing lines the poor fish wouldn't have so many *lines* given them; that Mr Willoughby wished to spare the *rod*, and such like ill-timed pleasantries. I promised to follow him as soon as I could, and sat down in the deserted school-

room to get over my disagreeable task. But just as I was beginning, I was interrupted by hearing George Kennedy and Dunnismore talking in the lavatory.

"I think we can manage it," said George.

"It's all right. Don't tell any more of the fellows. There will only be the greater chance of being twigged, you know."

With natural curiosity I went out into the lavatory to see what they were about. But they had just quitted it, and through the window I saw them walking away. George was in his white trousers, equipped for football; but you may imagine that Dunnismore was not much given to vulgar exertions of this sort. By rights he ought to have been obliged to play twice a week, but his lordship contrived to get a special dispensation from Marshall, who took upon himself the enforcing of this law and executed it with great zeal in most cases.

It was disgusting to see these fellows going off while I was cooped up to do horrid lines; but it couldn't be helped, so with a yawn I set to work. Then either because I was wondering what George and Dunnismore were up to, or was too anxious to join Lessing, and proved the truth of the adage, "the more hurry the less speed," I made a scribble of my lines again, and was once more turned back by Mr Willoughby.

"Smith, I told you that you were to write slowly and neatly and put in all the accents. You would save yourself trouble by doing these things carefully at first, for I certainly shall make you write them again and again till you do. Go back and write it all over. Neither you nor I shall go out this afternoon till this imposition is properly done."

I hadn't courage to be openly rude to him, but I dare say

my face expressed quite enough sulkiness to make him feel unhappy. I didn't understand then how he tormented himself when he thought it right to torment us. Back I went to the schoolroom in a nice state of mind, and as the best part of the afternoon was clearly lost, I at first resolved not to do the lines at all and take the consequences. I wandered about the room, gazed disconsolately out of the window, wondered how many fish Lessing had caught, silently called Mr Willoughby many bad names, and felt as if I should like to knock my own head or somebody else's against the wall for a few minutes. When I had grown tired of this, and of looking at one or two books in the fellows' shelves, and of poking the fire, I found a mouse in the room, and the excitement of taking shots at it with a pewter inkpot somewhat roused my spirits. On the whole I thought it would be as well to have another shot at the imposition; so, after paying a visit to the matron's room, and having a little conversation with Abbing, who was laid up there with the toothache, I went to work again, and this time was more careful. Then I took the lines to Mr Willoughby's room, feeling rather nervous, partly at the chance of being sent back a third time, and partly about the lecture which I expected to come in for anyhow.

He did give me a lecture, but it wasn't of the kind that I had expected. He seemed quite relieved to find that the imposition would do, and talked to me very kindly and patiently about my carelessness. That very morning he had got a letter from my father complaining of certain misspelt scrawls which I had been sending home of late, unless I wanted money or a hamper, when I was sure to take more trouble about my letters. Mr Willoughby showed me my father's letter, and told me that he had been thinking



a good deal about this fault. In proof of it he produced several of my exercises—how surprised I was that he had taken the trouble to preserve them!—and pointed out blunders which could only come from sheer want of attention. He didn't seem to be scolding at all, and yet he made me feel keenly the justice of his reproaches.

"I am afraid you think me hard on you, Smith," he said ; "but you must see that you bring all this on yourself. I am very sorry to have to punish you thus, but it would really be far more unkind if I allowed you to have your own way and grow up without any attempt to check this habit of carelessness. Let me show you another instance of what I mean—it is a little thing, but little things show how the wind is blowing. I told you to be most particular in putting on the breathings in this imposition ; and I see you have done so in most places, but in the first half-dozen lines here are one, two, three—seven breathings left out."

"I intended to put them all in, sir."

"I see you did, and so I will take the lines this time ; but the best intentions, Smith, are not of much use to boys, or to men either, who don't think what they are doing and try with all their might to do it well. Intention is a very good fellow in his way, but attention is worth twenty of him."

I smiled at this, which I recognised as one of Mr Williamson's stock sayings, but there was a tear behind the smile. This was my first private interview with Mr Willoughby, and he was unexpectedly speaking so like a friend and so unlike a master, that I was quite touched by what he said. He saw that he made an impression on me, and dismissed me with a pat on the shoulder, and a word of encouragement.

"Well, Smith, forget all about it just now, but don't forget to be more careful the next time, and don't despise being careful about even such little things as breathings. I am sure you would like me to be able to write home to your father and tell him that you were trying to please him in this way."

My sulkiness had quite passed into a softer feeling now, and when I left Mr Willoughby, I was—pooh!—no, surely not!—at all events I made haste to put a stop to it, for there was Abbing coming out of the matron's room, and I was not going to let him see that I had been crying. But he looked at my face very suspiciously, and asked what had been the matter.

"Oh! I've been showing up a Greek imposition to Edwyn Phillip, and he has been rowing me for not putting curly tails on the top of the letters."

"He's an ass," said Abbing.

But though I spoke thus lightly of Mr Willoughby, I felt a great deal of respect at that moment for him, and made an honest resolve not to get into any more scrapes with him if I could help it. And then I began to wish that George understood him better, and wouldn't behave in the reckless way that he had been doing of late. I should have liked to speak to him about his new friendship with Marshall, but I knew that he wouldn't listen to me. And I could not help thinking of a former occasion, when, soon after I came to Whitminster School, George Kennedy had warned me against getting into bad company, and I had thought proper to resent his interference.

George had lately taken to pay nightly visits to Marshall's study, or to the dormitory in which Dunnismore slept, where he would stay for hours after we were supposed to have gone to bed, at the risk of being caught by Mr

Willoughby. That night he took himself off as soon as the master had made his rounds, and I noticed that, whereas he would generally slip on his trousers and run across to the other room, this time he did not undress and had come upstairs with his boots on. It looked as if he wasn't merely going to have some grub or a chat with the other fellows, and I couldn't help connecting it with what I had heard Dunnismore say that afternoon, and guessed that there was some dangerous expedition on foot. Then I heard stealthy footsteps creeping downstairs, and my suspicions were increased. What could these fellows be going to do?

Most of the other boys in our room were tired by a football match that had been going on that afternoon, and soon fell asleep. Balbus was snoring peacefully, undisturbed by the salutation of brushes or slippers with which the stertorous notes that proceeded from his great nose were generally greeted. Next to me Lessing was muttering and moving about in his sleep. The moonlight through the windows showed me all the other fellows lying quiet in their white beds, and in the intervals between Balbus's dulcet strains I could hear a solitary mouse scratching in the wall, doubtless hastening from this barren land, where there were no cupboards and nothing eatable to be got at except soap, shoes, and iron bedsteads. But I lay awake, thinking of many things, of Mr Willoughby, of my father's letter, of George, of his brother Harry—poor Harry! at that moment lying so quiet in his little grave under the sweet moonlight. I thought of the days when he was among us, so happy, and hearty, and honest, that it seemed impossible that he could be dead. It was to him I owed it if I was in any way different from fellows like Dunnismore and Abbing, for both before and after his death I had been saved from many a

base and unworthy action by the thought that he would have scorned it—shrank from it, rather, for there was little scorn in that pure and loving heart. It was no wise and grave mentor that I was looking back to ; he had the same school-boy imperfections and temptations as myself, and God had given him grace to pass through them unscathed ; he had more than a schoolboy's love of fun and contempt of danger, and yet no one had ever heard him mock what was sacred or despise what was weak. As I tossed uneasily on my bed, I seemed to see him among us again. He was in that very room, running along with careless laughter, jumping over the bedsteads, attacking Balbus with his pillow, chaffing his big brother, turning aside from his play to speak to some fellow who had got hurt, dashing into bed at the approach of the master, and covering his merry little face with the blankets till that danger was overpast. With such memories there comes to the mind of the most thoughtless boy some understanding of the awfulness and mystery of the angel Death, who so silently and invisibly is ever among us, cutting down old and young in the brightest sunshine as well as the darkest night.

It was not this dormitory, however, in which I could best fancy him present. After his death George could not bear to sleep in the same room and see his empty bed every night. He had spoken to Mrs Pearson about it, and we were all moved into this other room, the largest dormitory in the house. In spite of their frequent squabbles, there never was a pair of brothers who in reality loved each other and stuck to each other better, and I thought that if Harry were still alive George would surely not be quite what he was. It seemed strange to think of Harry's brother as the friend of Marshall and Dunnismore. My uneasy feelings

about the way he was going on returned with double force. I fear I did not look at the matter from a high enough point of view. I did not rightly understand the danger in which my friend was, but perhaps God heard a boyish prayer which went up from my heart if not from my lips, that He would make George and me more like what Harry had been.

I lay awake for what seemed to me a very long time and heard the Minster clock chime the quarters again and again, but at length I was dozing off when I was aroused by a boy at the other end of the room, who sat up in bed and cried out—

“I swear I’ll tan you if you don’t shut up.”

I lifted my head to see what was the matter, and found it was only Beesley talking in his sleep. But this kept me awake for some minutes longer, and just as I was getting drowsy again I heard a noise of footsteps underneath the window which was slightly open. I sat up and listened, and heard George Kennedy’s voice. How had he got out, and what had he been doing? A sudden impulse made me get up and run down to meet him, with nothing but my railway rug wrapped round me.

Down the dark, cold stone staircase I felt my way to the lavatory, and as soon as I entered it I saw by the moonlight that a bar had been taken away from one of the windows, and a rope was dangling from another of the bars. It was a distance of about eight feet to the ground, and of course the bars were the only obstacle to getting out of the house that way. I heard voices whispering outside, and there was just time to shrink back into a dark corner before Dunnismore’s head appeared at the opening, and he climbed inside, followed by Marshall and Kennedy.

"Here we are!" exclaimed George in a louder voice than was prudent.

"Hush!" said Dunnismore, taking up the bar and beginning to fit it into its place.

For the first time it now struck me that I was in rather an awkward position. These fellows could not fail to see me as they passed out of the lavatory, so I thought I had better show myself at once. I came forward into the moonlight, and as may be supposed my sudden appearance gave the three nocturnal adventurers a great fright. Dunnismore dropped the bar with a clang, Marshall uttered an oath, and George Kennedy started back, though he was the first to recognise me.

"What are you doing here, Smith? Confound you, I don't want you to spy after me."

He spoke in a loud, excited tone, and I saw that he had been drinking.

"I say! I didn't think you were such a sneak."

"What the deuce do you mean by coming to frighten us this way?" exclaimed Marshall. "You little hound, I'll give you an awful thrashing."

"For goodness sake don't make such a row," said Dunnismore, holding him back.

"I didn't mean to spy on you," I protested. "I heard some one talking down here and I came to see what was the matter."

"It's a cursed lie!"

"You have been sitting up watching us all night, I believe," said George, angrily.

"Indeed I haven't. And I won't say a word to any one about it."

"You had better not, or I'll break every bone in your body."

"Well, let us get to bed," said Dunnismore, who had been engaged in fastening up the window. "If any one has heard that row we shall be all caught in another minute."

This was too sound advice to be disregarded, and without delay we crept upstairs. When we got into our room George pushed past me without a word, and throwing off his clothes got into bed. So did I, and lay awake for another hour at least, feeling very unhappy. I tried to get George to speak to me, but he was either asleep or wouldn't answer. Oh, Harry! and it was only two or three days before that we two had been standing arm-in-arm and looking at the daisies over your grave.

Next morning George made no secret of his expedition.

"Willoughby thought he was very clever to confine us to bounds all day," he said, as we were dressing. "But we have found out a way of getting into the town in spite of him, you see."

"Where did you go to?" asked Balbus, with much interest.

"Oh, we went to Matthews' to get some grub; but all the shops were shut, so we turned into a public-house and had a lot of beer."

"By Jove!" said Abbing, with profound admiration.

"I say, it's a wonder you weren't caught."

"Well, there was one sneak who set himself to spy on us," said George, bitterly. "But Willoughby won't catch us at it in a hurry."

"Justice comes with slow but sure foot," puffed out Lessing, as he raised his head from a long dip in the basin. "You had better look out or—" the rest of the sentence was lost in consequence of the speaker getting some soap suds into his mouth.

"Don't preach, you idiot of an ape," replied George, shying his sponge at him.

"I pray thee, do not mock me, fellow student," replied Lessing.

"I mean to go out again, and to ask Edwyn Phillip to supper some night at the Black Boy."

"He'll ask you to have something for breakfast next morning, and then it will be the black and blue boy," said Lessing, who had caught the sponge, and before shying it back was squeezing the water out of it, so as to run down Ben Cane's back into his trousers—a polite attention which caused Mr Balbus to seize his towel, and prepare to retaliate.

Then began a flipping match between these two that engrossed public attention for a few minutes, and George seemed to be rather disappointed that we should be so easily diverted from the discussion of his exploits.

"You are a set of funks," he said, scornfully; and, finding no one notice this remark, he proceeded to vent his indignation upon Abbing, who in cold weather would never take off his nightshirt to wash, and did not appear to visit his neck with the benefits of soap and water.

"I declare I'll tell all the fellows if you are such a pig," said George, in this new character of sanitary reformer; and Abbing went downstairs cleaner than usual that morning, which is an example of the proverb about an ill wind blowing somebody good.

But George's crossness blew no good to me, I saw. He was evidently deeply offended with me, and if I had been a profounder student of human nature, I might have guessed that he was not quite satisfied with himself and willing to wreak his dissatisfaction on somebody else, as we are all so



prone to do when we can find a whipping boy to suffer for our offences.

My readers must by this time know as well as we did that George's outbursts of temper took two forms. Generally they were sudden, loud, and short as a summer thunderstorm, but sometimes he got into a more settled state of sullenness, and then there was no saying when fine weather would return. This was the case now, I was very much vexed to perceive. I tried my best to make up with him. I spoke to him as if nothing had happened, but he turned his back on me and began to whistle. I offered him a slice of a cake which had been sent me from home, but that was no use—George was not the fellow to be bribed out of his wrath, and he would not even thank me. I wrote him a note in school time, but he tore it up and made no answer. He certainly interfered with Marshall to save me from a licking which that amiable young man proposed to bestow on me ; but in doing so he spoke of me in a contemptuous way that hurt my feelings almost more than Marshall's tender mercies would have done. Then I began to feel offended in my turn and to keep aloof from him, and so we who a few days before had been inseparable, now found ourselves on the high road to dire enmity.





## CHAPTER IX.

### WORSE AND WORSE.

**W**HEN Sunday came, I hoped George would ask me to go a walk, which among us was considered a sign of reconciliation. But he went out with Marshall, and I accepted an invitation to be Phillips' companion.

Mr Phillips, or Miss Phillips, as we preferred to call him, was growing to be a tall and interesting youth, and had lately taken to literary pursuits with great zeal. I don't mean his lessons; his genius soared above the commonplace toil of construing and repetition. That Sunday afternoon he showed me in the strictest confidence some verses which he had addressed to a young lady residing in the town, and even went the length of giving me a sketch of a novel that he purposed writing and offering for the consideration of the editor of the *Family Herald*.

The title of this work was to be "Ethelbert D'Artagnan, or the Black Hussar." The scene was laid in Italy—no, it was Spain, I think—and the time was that century of the middle ages when people used to wear rapiers and slashed doublets,

and say "avaunt!" "methinks!" and other words belonging to what is called "the language of the period." The hero was only a Count, but then he had an elder brother who was nothing less than a Duke; and who, not content with robbing him of his share of the inheritance, endeavoured to rival Ethelbert in the affections of the heroine. She had golden hair, and dark flashing eyes. The Count was handsome, active, well dressed, and brave; the Duke was, of course, a very disagreeable object with the usual scowl. As is generally the case, the richer of the two was the suitor preferred by the young lady's papa, a King of some place vaguely described as a "rich and fertile land of the South," who was in the habit of getting into a passion, and calling out "seize him!" in a ferocious manner. A ghost pervaded the whole story, turning up on all important occasions, but I forget what was supposed to happen from his interference. In the first volume the hero was to rescue the heroine from a mad bull, and the usual results were to follow. In the second volume the Count was to be shut up in a dungeon, and to hold much conversation alternately with the ghost through the ceiling, and with his lady love through the grated window. Towards the end of this volume he was to escape by a subterranean passage which nobody but the ghost knew anything about; and in the next to rebel against his elder brother. Then came a great battle in which the Duke was killed, and the King taken prisoner, and the rest of the plot was plain sailing.

I agreed with Phillips that it would read very fine, and that the editor of the *Family Herald* could not fail to be eager to print it. If he got anything for the copyright, Phillips assured me he would give a supper to the whole dormitory.

As he was expounding this design to me, we were overtaken by Mr Willoughby, who asked us if we should mind his accompanying us, and talked so pleasantly all the way that Phillips and I voted him a much jollier fellow than we had ever supposed. When he had once got over a certain shyness which at first he seemed to feel among the boys, he appeared to much greater advantage; and most of us were beginning to think that he wouldn't make a bad master if only he weren't so strict, and didn't worry so much about little things.

In the course of our walk, we contrived to stumble upon George Kennedy. I was not very well pleased to meet him when in such company, for the first look he cast at me said as plainly as words could do—"Have you gone over to the enemy?" And George, for his part, was not particularly glad to see us, inasmuch as he was aiding and abetting in something which he had rather not have Mr Willoughby know about. The fact was this, in an old elm tree, half dead and covered with ivy, Master Abbing had discovered a thrush's nest, and forthwith told George about it. I believe Abbing was tired of being looked upon as a sneak, and wanted to cultivate rather better society; at all events, George was tempted by news of the first nest of the season, and condescended to accompany him to the place, and then, forgetting their Sunday clothes and their Sunday behaviour, the two got up the tree, and were engaged in rifling the nest when they saw Mr Willoughby and us coming slowly across the field. They crouched behind the ivy, trying to hide themselves, quite successfully as far as Mr Willoughby was concerned, for he was peeping under the hedge-rows looking for early wild-flowers. But as we approached the old elm-tree Phillips and I were aware of two boys sitting in it, and

though we could not make out who they were, we guessed the state of the case quite well enough to be laudably desirous of getting the master out of the way. So we were rather taken aback when he proposed to sit down and rest under this very tree.

"Hadn't we better go on to the next field, sir?" said Phillips. "There's a prettier view from there."

"I think we shall do better where we are," said Mr Willoughby. "This ivy gives some shade, and really it is quite hot."

He had already lain down, so Phillips and I followed his example, and we reposed there for some time, looking at the view and chatting. Mr Willoughby seemed anxious to get us to take an interest in botany. He pulled a primrose to pieces and explained to us its structure, and waxed quite enthusiastic about its beauty, and feelingly repeated Wordsworth's lines—

" Thanks to the human heart by which we live,  
Thanks to its joys, its tenderness, its fears,  
To me the meanest flower that blows can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

Then he quoted several other poetical allusions to the primrose, and told us the classical legend of the beautiful youth who died of grief and was changed into this flower, and in fact preached from his pretty little yellow text a sermon which at any other time might have been very interesting. But Phillips and I were thinking all the while how uncomfortable the poor fellows up in the tree would be, and to them cramped in one uneasy posture and not daring to stir, this primrose was no doubt a nuisance and something more. And just as he had got to the lines about Peter Bell, one of the unfortunates overhead felt that he

could stand it no longer. He shifted himself on to another branch which broke beneath his weight, and down he came, dragging a great ruin of ivy after him, and almost falling on the top of Mr Willoughby.

"A primrose by the river's brim," our master had begun, when he was thus rudely interrupted, and started up in amazement to see Abbing sprawling on the ground, and George Kennedy's legs hanging suspended in mid-air.

"Come down," said Mr. Willoughby, quite unnecessarily, for George was already coming down with a run.

"What were you two boys doing up there?"

George said nothing, but Abbing confessed at once. I suppose I ought to make Abbing tell a lie, since, as we know, it was his nature to do so under such circumstances. But the fact is that only in stories do people always act up to their character, and if I am to tell the truth, I must say that Abbing told the truth, or at least that it was shaken out of him.

"We were after a bird's nest, sir," he said, getting up gingerly, and feeling himself all over as if he weren't quite sure how many bones were broken.

"Oh, boys, I don't like that!" said Mr Willoughby, seemingly vexed. "Kennedy, I am sorry I should so often have to find fault with you. Do you think you have been doing right in bird-nesting on Sunday?"

"It wasn't forbidden, sir," said George, somewhat sullenly. He was not going to encourage Willoughby to "jaw" him.

By this time Abbing, recovered from the surprise of his fall, began to feel himself again, and came to the rescue.

"We weren't bird-nesting," he said with a slight touch of virtuous indignation in his tone. "We only came to this

tree to look at a nest, and then we went up and peeped in and took the eggs."

This defence was very ingenious and quite original, for I don't suppose Abbing had ever heard of Monsieur Jourdain, who wasn't a shopkeeper, but only collected goods and gave them to his friends for money. But Mr Willoughby seemed moved by it to nothing but a slight degree of contempt, and he turned to George and addressed him—

"I am quite sure this is not a way in which you ought to spend your Sundays, and I can't help thinking that you must know that. As there is, I believe, no positive rule on the subject, I am not sure whether it is my duty to punish you, but I shall think the matter over before the evening, and speak to you again."

"Very well," said George, in a blunt, careless tone, that pained Mr Willoughby.

"You need not be rude, Kennedy," he said.

"I didn't mean to be rude," said George.

"I think I know what you meant. I wish you knew how vexed I have been to see the disobedient and defiant attitude which you seem to assume towards the discipline of the school. I fear I shall have to send home a very bad report of you at Easter. And, Kennedy, let me remind you that you gave me your name as wishing to be confirmed this summer. I hope I misjudge you, but from what I have seen of your conduct, I can't help thinking that you have not reflected about the meaning of such a profession."

George winced at this threat of a bad report, and at the allusion to his confirmation. If Mr Willoughby had understood human nature a little better, he would have stopped there, but he mistakenly imagined that he read stubbornness

on the boy's face, and went on to strike quite the wrong nail on the head.

"I think I have already shown you," he said, "that though I do not like severity, I am not to be trifled with. If you mean to go on acting as a ringleader in acts of disobedience, I mean to go on punishing you till I break your spirit."

At this George curled his lip, and finding that Mr Willoughby had no more to say, stalked away without touching his hat, though Abbing made up for this neglect by the profusion of his own politeness. Phillips and I walked off in the other direction with Mr Willoughby, but we did not have any more talk about primroses. He was evidently pained by George's rudeness, and we were concerned about what would come of it. Bird-nesting on Sunday seemed a great crime, and we feared George would have a severe punishment.

It was not so, however. In the evening Mr Willoughby made us quite a long speech on the subject. He reviewed all the arguments that might be brought for or against Sunday bird-nesting, and finally came to the conclusion, that though it was not an offence of the first magnitude, it was decidedly a thing to be prohibited and punished for the future. But as for the two boys who had been caught at it, he explained that he had been in great doubt whether he ought to take further notice of their conduct, but since they could not be said to have infringed the letter of any law, he would give them the benefit of the doubt.

So George and Abbing got off, but George was not long of running into trouble again—no later than the next day, indeed. The old story. He hadn't done his work, was kept in, got sulky, "cheeked" one of the masters, was sent



up to Mr Dalton, had a very serious warning before the whole school and a long imposition. After this, all angry feeling I might have had towards him passed away, and I would have given anything to make up with him again. But he did not make any advances to me, and for another day we kept aloof from each other.

That night George and his two new companions again made use of the broken bar to go out into the town. They delayed for some time, waiting till Mr Willoughby had gone his rounds, but he did not appear, and not seeing a light in his room, they thought he must be out and would not come at all.

This was rash. They had scarcely been gone twenty minutes before Mr Willoughby came round the rooms with a candle in his hand as usual. He would merely look in and say good-night in most cases ; and this evening he might not have perceived that George was away, if it had not been for Balbus, who was sitting up in bed illegally eating a slice of bread and jam, and had just time to throw it down and cover it with a corner of the counterpane when the master came in. He dared not move for fear of disclosing this secret ; and when Mr Willoughby, noticing his peculiar attitude, stepped forward to find out what was the matter, he saw George's empty bed and asked where he was. No one answered, and Mr Willoughby went away and made a similar discovery in Dunnismore's dormitory. Marshall slept in one of the large studies and the master did not discover his absence. Mr Vials would have been sharper.

You may be sure we all kept awake, and when the adventurers returned there were plenty of tongues to tell them of the unfortunate event that had taken place in their absence. Schoolboys take such an interest in an exciting

"row" that they are apt to forget to pity the principal performers therein. They are not the only persons who have been said to find a certain pleasure in the misfortunes of their friends.

"I say, Kennedy, you'll catch it," opined Abbing. "You've been getting into such a lot of scrapes lately, and I shouldn't wonder if they expelled you."

"It's all humbug. You fellows are trying to cram me," said George, incredulously.

"You'll see to-morrow," and indeed he soon saw from our manner that the bad news was only too true.

"Well, hold your tongues about it, at all events," he said. "Of course, if we are caught we'll have to take the consequences, and talking about it will do no good."

Next morning George was in the same mood, and would not talk about his misfortune. I pitied him with all my heart, and I would have given anything to have got him out of the scrape. Perhaps he understood what I was thinking of—perhaps he felt that he had ill-treated me, and was ashamed to confess it. He did not speak to me then, and we both went downstairs into the yard behind the house, where most of the fellows were lounging about in the fresh air of a fine spring morning and getting an appetite for breakfast, if, indeed, a schoolboy ever requires to get an appetite.

I was feeding some rabbits which I had taken care of ever since a certain memorable day. They had been Harry Kennedy's, and as they rubbed their soft faces against my hand, I thought of—but no matter. George had the same thoughts, I dare say. He walked near me once or twice, and I saw him looking at me; then he suddenly came up and took my arm, with—

"I say, old fellow, why won't you speak to me?"

"Oh, George!" I replied, and my heart gave a great jump of pleasure.

"Well, perhaps I have been in a wax," he said, understanding my unspoken reproach. "But it's all right now, or at least it will be as soon as I have been up to Willoughby and had it over."

"Why *did* you go with these fellows last night?"

"I'm sure I wanted not to, but I had promised."

At that moment Marshall came up, and, roughly drawing George away, began to whisper to him. But before he had time to say half-a-dozen words, a message came that the boys of what were called the two lower dormitories were to come to Mr Willoughby's room at once, so off we went, those who were to "assist" at the forthcoming tragedy feeling no doubt much more at ease than the two who expected to be the principal performers.

"I have sent for you," said Mr Willoughby, "to make an inquiry into something which has given me great uneasiness. Last night I found two boys out of their beds so late as eleven o'clock. Dunnismore, you were one. Where were you?"

"I wasn't out of my room, sir," said Dunnismore, with well-affected surprise. "Oh, yes! I remember; I think I was in the lavatory about that time, but it was only for a few minutes. I was nowhere else, sir; I really wasn't."

"And you, Kennedy?"

"I would rather not say, sir."

"I am sorry to say that I have strong suspicions about you two. Mrs Pearson heard a noise outside; this morning I find the mark of footsteps below a window of which one

of the bars has been loosened. I didn't sit up to watch, but now I ask you to tell me the truth: were you out of the house last night?"

"I am sure I wasn't, sir," said Dunnismore, with too great eagerness.

"Were you, Kennedy?"

George looked at Dunnismore as if to say, "what can I do?" and then replied in a low voice—

"Yes, sir."

"Do you mean to persist in your denial?" cried Mr Willoughby, turning upon Dunnismore. "No! I see in your face that you have told me a falsehood. You may well shrink back and turn pale, if you did not blush when you tried to deceive me. Dunnismore, I was vexed before, and now I am utterly disgusted about this affair. It was a comparatively little matter to break the rules of the house by wilful disobedience; it is a great matter that one of you should be a liar and a coward."

Dunnismore quailed before this burst of indignation, and shrank back as far as he could.

"Yes! you do right to show yourself afraid; but do not think that I shall undertake your punishment. I shall ask you no more questions; I shall inquire no more into this matter, and if you have dared to tell me a cowardly lie before your schoolfellows, I shall leave you to the contempt of every one among them who has one spark of courage and honour. Kennedy, I shall treat you differently. You have shown yourself too manly to shirk a punishment that you have deserved, and I shall punish you. If I were in your place, I would rather suffer the sharpest punishment than feel the shame of a lie. Come to me at twelve o'clock, and in the meanwhile I will think over the matter."

"May I have it now, sir," said George. "I don't like to be kept waiting."

"Very well," said Mr Willoughby; and without another word, gave him a severe caning. George didn't stand this so well as usual. He did not cry out, but I saw him biting his lips, and the tears glistening in his eyes. At length the cane broke, and Mr Willoughby flung it away. Then, stooping down, he whispered something in George's ear.

"You may go," he said to Dunnismore, in such a tone that every word seemed to cut worse than the cane could have done. "I am not sure if I have done right in your case. But I do not know how to punish such a fault as yours, and I feel that my work would be unbearable if I had constantly to coerce cowards by the fear of punishment, and not to deal with manly boys who can be trusted to act with at least the honour of gentlemen. You may go, I say," he repeated, for Dunnismore seemed to think the news too good to be true.

When Mr Willoughby reflected over the matter, I dare say he reproached himself for having been unjust and having made a mistake in letting Dunnismore off, but he hadn't. None of his elaborate attempts to secure our allegiance to his government ever went so straight to the mark as that random shaft. I don't know how to explain it, but a decision like this commended itself more to our moral feelings than a very judgment of Solomon would have done. As we were moved to contempt of Dunnismore and his doings, so we thought George Kennedy a fine fellow, and transferred a certain amount of our sympathy for him to the master who had punished him. This is strange, but true. Marshall, and Dunnismore, and some other fellows, indeed, took great trouble to argue that George oughtn't to have

exercised his virtue so as to get another fellow into trouble, and went the length of calling him a sneak—behind his back ; but the public generally didn't agree with them, as it would probably have done if George had been more unpopular than he was. George's friends warmly defended him from the charge of acting dishonourably, and Lessing was moved to narrate a story out of the Greek Delectus about a fox who had lost his tail, and wanted to persuade all the other foxes that tails were most unnecessary and inconvenient appendages. But George himself, when he had thought over it, was not quite sure that he had done right. It seemed to him wrong to get another fellow into a scrape in any way or under any circumstances, and Dunnismore might have asked him to do anything but tell a lie.

After this George's friendship with Marshall came to an end, and he and I were as much together as ever. Only a few days remained before the Easter holidays, and during this time he was very quiet, and did his work unusually well. Perhaps he was thinking of what his father and mother would say when they heard about his bad conduct, or perhaps of what Mr Willoughby had whispered into his ear after the caning :

*" Kennedy, I am glad to see that you are not a coward. I should be far more glad if you were brave in doing right."*





## CHAPTER X

### THE FIRST OF APRIL

**G**EORGE only got into one more scrape that quarter, and it was one in which he had several companions. The very last day before the Easter holidays happened to be the first of April, and we were minded to amuse ourselves with a great joke of the customary kind.

The year before all our form had been delighted by an attempt to make an April fool of Mr Williamson. Some fellow had bet Lessing a bottle of gingerbeer that he daren't do it, and our friend the Monkey accepted the challenge to a trick which was quite in his line. As soon as the master entered his class-room, Lessing darted forward and with well-feigned alarm exclaimed—

“Oh, sir! look behind you!”

Mr Williamson turned sharply round, and then learning from a roar of laughter that he had been taken in, he put on a grave face and addressed the impertinent joker.

“Come, Lessing, this is all very well among your companions, but I can't allow you to be rude to your masters.

I am sorry to have to punish you, for I dare say you didn't mean any great harm ; but I must do it. Come here after school with your Horace, and don't go away till you have learned the thirty-ninth ode of the first book. It is not a very long one, but you must learn it perfectly."

We thought this hard lines, and it was with a rather rueful face that Lessing brought down his Horace and set himself to find the thirty-ninth ode of the first book. But his search was for good reasons unavailing, and then it began to dawn upon him that he had been beaten with his own weapons. When Mr Williamson saw him in the afternoon, he grinned and said—

"Well, Lessing, who is the April fool now ? Two people can play at that game. But I say, you fellows, don't try on this sort of trick again. 'Tisn't the correct thing, Mr Monkey."

We laughed and voted him a jolly fellow, and did not pay much attention to this prohibition. So next year we were anxious to repeat the trick. We did not like to try it on with Mr Willoughby, but Lessing invented a cunning trap for old Paddy ; and, though I dare say he was looking out sharp, he fell into it most completely.

Our form was "up" to Mr Williamson in the large school-room. We were construing Sallust with great gravity, when first one boy and then another began to glance up to the ceiling, and then hastily looked away as if he saw there something startling. This went on for two or three minutes, till our master's curiosity was aroused, and he must needs look also to see what was the matter. He took a steady gaze at the point which seemed to be attracting our attention, and then a subdued titter broke out all along the form and told him that we had been too clever for him.



"No more of this fooling!" he cried so loudly as to make all the other boys and masters turn round and stare at him. "I suppose this is some more of your impertinence, Lessing. I thought I cautioned you last year not to repeat it. I declare I have a good mind to give you the soundest thrashing you ever had in your life. I tell you, put an end to this at once," he bellowed, turning round and boxing Beesley's ears, for that young gentleman happened to sit next to him and was unable soon enough to compose his countenance.

We were rather surprised at this outburst of temper, for he had been in exuberant good humour for some time. There was nothing for it, however, but to submit, so we made haste to dismiss the slightest trace of a grin from our faces and assumed an appearance of profound attention to our work. We knew by long and sad experience that though Mr Williamson in a peaceful state of mind was one of the most jovial of men, in a rage he was no more to be played with than a hungry bear. He was in a rage now, evidently. He snapped and snarled all the rest of the lesson, growing louder and fiercer at every blunder; and when he sent us to our desks to look over our history for ten minutes while he corrected our verses, such as they were, we began to tremble; for to tell the truth our history was generally taken up in the afternoon, and as that was a saint's day we had expected to get off it altogether, so all fourth-form schoolboys may guess what most of us had done in the way of preparing it.

Then that stupid Phillips, giving the matter up as a bad job, I suppose, began scribbling something in his note-book instead of following the march of Hannibal, and thereby drew upon himself the first fury of the storm. For Mr Williamson saw him and called out—

“Phillips, you idle blockhead, bring me that directly.”

Phillips came out with glowing cheeks, holding his notebook in his hand, and seemed very unwilling to let what he had been writing be seen, but Mr Williamson insisted on it, and snatching the book from him read out—

“ Oh woman fair ! Oh fatal snare !  
Oh marble heart that made mine break !  
I see thee near, thy voice I hear ;  
My burning thirst I long to slake.  
Oh wind that blew ! Oh stars that knew  
My faith and her well-varnished lies !  
Oh long past hours, from wither'd bowers  
To bear your witness now arise !”

The fact was that poor Phillips had been cultivating his muse under the inspiration of a package of gingerbread nuts. He now had to endure the agony of hearing his impassioned strains recited in public, while he stood hanging his head and looking unutterably ashamed of himself. Moreover, he had just filled his mouth with a large gingerbread nut, which he was now making desperate efforts to dispose of without crunching it ; so perhaps Jemima was at that moment the most unhappy bard that ever attained the honour of publicity. The horrors of criticism are nothing to what he suffered.

“ Oh words she spoke ! Oh heart she broke !”

—Mr Williamson went on, and then flung away the book with a contemptuous—“ Rubbish !”

“ And this is the way you trifle away your time ! No wonder you never know your history. But I'll teach you, sir, to make a fool of me. You will write out the lesson twenty times, and that will take you the best part of the

holidays, if I am not mistaken. At least, you shall do so, if I see you idling for one single moment all the rest of the morning. Do you hear me, sir? Look here, boys, if you have time to waste in this way, I suppose you can say your lesson perfectly, so come up at once and we shall see—we shall see."

With grave forebodings and reproachful glances at Phillips we took our places round the master's desk, and just then one of the fifth form brought him a note from Mr Dalton. I dare say that it was a request that he would not make such a noise in the schoolroom; at all events he seemed very much annoyed by it, and in a lower tone, but with a blacker frown, turned upon us the artillery of his wrath.

And a woeful exhibition we made, that might have tried the temper of the gentlest of pedagogues. Phillips declared that Hannibal assembled his forces in Sicily and from there crossed the Alps somewhere near Zama, a view that has not been adopted by any of the more celebrated scholars who have written on this subject. Beesley held that Hannibal was defeated and killed at Trasimenus, and being asked where or what Trasimenus was, replied at a venture, "an island in the Ægean sea," an answer which was always considered among us as the likeliest shot that could be made into the darkness of ancient geography. Kennedy, on the other hand, was of opinion that he took the city of Rome after a siege of eighteen months and put all the principal inhabitants to death. Ben Cane had got fast hold of the tail of the fact that the Romans used elephants to transport their magazines across the Ticinus, and he unfortunately attached a train of artillery, as well, to those useful quadrupeds; whereupon, being pressed as to the meaning of the word magazines, and remembering with confusion that gun-

powder was an invention of somewhat later date, he hazarded the solution "little books." Another boy said that Hannibal used vinegar to melt the snow on his march; and I believe I reached the climax of absurdity by asserting that in times of great danger the Romans were wont to appoint a magistrate called a "Cunctator," who held power for six months.

Mr Williamson sat listening to our blunders with a sarcastic smile, and now he closed the book abruptly and said, in a solemn and impressive manner that sounded far more alarming than his noisier outbursts of wrath—

"Utterly disgraceful! I never in all my life saw such an exhibition. I have passed three questions round the whole form without an answer. I have allowed several boys to talk the most unmitigated rubbish for ten minutes. Do you think I am going to waste my time any longer? I tell ye, boys, I have been completely disgusted with the work of this form for the last fortnight. But you are very much mistaken if you think I am going to put up with it—*very* much mistaken. Go back to your places this moment, you idle dunces, and never DARE to bring me up a lesson in this way again! Kennedy, Dunnismore, Lessing, don't you feel ashamed of yourselves? As for the rest of you, I am not surprised. I expect to gather nothing but donkeys off thistles—I mean to say—how dare you laugh, Parker? Come to me at twelve o'clock! You will all stay in this afternoon to learn your history, and I'll teach you what it is to trifle with me."

Looking half humbled and half sulky we slunk back to our desks. This was evidently no joke, and we resolved to be very cautious another first of April how we presumed upon Mr Williamson's good nature. The fellows of the

other forms laughed at us and said we were "fair licked," which was very aggravating, for if you do get into trouble, nothing can be less consoling than to be told that you have brought it on yourself. But there was no help for it, and in the afternoon—such a sunny, warm afternoon!—we had to present ourselves in the empty schoolroom and sit down mournfully to that horrible history.

When we had been working at it with more or less diligence for some half-an-hour, Mr Williamson appeared upon the scene. We were all upon our best behaviour at once, but we were soon greatly relieved to find that he was in a much better humour than he had been in the morning. He had been having his dinner and a pipe, no doubt.

"Do you know this history?" he asked.

"Not yet, sir."

"Donkeys! Look here; whether would you rather finish it or come out and have a bathe with me?"

"Oh! A bathe! a bathe!" we shouted.

"Come along, then. I will punish you by making each fellow take three headers and swim three times across the river. But don't you break down in your history again, or I shall push the fashion of my malice beyond this last hour of act. Will you remember that, Kennedy?"

"All right, sir;" and we flung away our books and rushed out in high glee. We stopped for a minute at Mr Williamson's lodgings to get two or three towels, and then, chattering and laughing along the sleepy street of Whitminster in a way that made people turn round and stare after us and wish, perhaps, that they were schoolboys themselves, hurried off to the favourite bathing-place, which was about a mile from the town.

Bathing was very popular among us. The Whitminster

fellows, all the boarders, at least, were almost compelled by the force of public opinion to learn swimming, and none of us ever regretted it. Any boy who was considered to be too lazy about learning, was liable to be rolled in the mud till he was covered with a thick coating from head to foot and then ducked in the water till he reassumed the appearance of a white and civilised creature. This discipline was so effectual that we were allowed to go to any part of the river we liked, and in my time there was only one case of a dangerous accident. How we always enjoyed the first bathe of the year! That afternoon we enjoyed it thoroughly, I know. Dunnismore and Phillips were the only ones who didn't go in. Dunnismore said he had a cold and would rather look on, and Jemima declared that a doctor had told him not to bathe till July, but the rest of us lost no time in reducing ourselves to a state of nudity, and if perchance some poet was wandering pensively over the green meadows, he might have been startled by the spectacle of a troop of young Adams plunging and splashing into the blue water and racing along the grassy banks as merrily and carelessly as if they had been a very paradise of daisies and dandelions.

Though the sun was hot the water was too cold to stay in long, but we made the best of it. George Kennedy and Lessing got hold of an old boat, and, having removed the oars and so forth, embarked therein and made vigorous attempts to upset it, but without success. Other fellows indulged in diving and triumphantly fished up handfuls of mud from the bottom. Others, less adventurous, puffed philosophically across the stream and then squatted on the edge to enjoy a comfortable shiver. Mr Williamson entered into the fun with all the spirits of a boy, throwing off the

master as completely as his clothes. You should have seen him chasing Balbus along the bank till they both came to grief in a bed of nettles. Lessing laughed at this misfortune, so Paddy sprung into the water after him, and not being able to catch the old Monkey, who dived to the bottom and came up just behind his pursuer, he ducked George instead; then George waited for his revenge, and coming behind the master in an unsuspecting moment, gave him a shove that sent him flying into the deep hole. We all roared with laughter at this, and when Mr Williamson reappeared he set to work pelting us with bits of clay, which stung no end when they hit you on the bare back, I can tell you, and then we pelted him and he chased us; and if you had seen us all at high jinks together, you would never have thought that this was the formidable tyrant before whom an hour ago we had stood meek as to our countenances and trembling as to our knees.

At length we had had enough of it, and dressing ourselves with a great deal of chaffing and skirmishing, we proceeded more leisurely towards home. On the way we fell in with a woman lugging along an enormous basket of oranges, and Mr Williamson said he would bring down two acts of charity with one stone, by relieving her of part of her burden and treating us to a couple of oranges a-piece. Both of the parties whom he proposed thus to benefit were nowise unwilling, so Mr Williamson bought the oranges, and had just paid for them, when he exclaimed—

“I say!”

“What’s the matter, sir?”

“Why, when I came out this afternoon, I had half-a-sovereign and some silver in my purse. I declare the half-sovereign has gone!”

"Where has it gone to, sir?" said Balbus, with open eyes.

"That's what I want to know. Do any of you boys know anything about it?" asked Mr Williamson, sharply, looking round at us.

"No, sir."

"No one could have taken it while you were bathing, sir," said Phillips. "I was sitting by all the time, and I should have been sure to have seen."

"Very odd!" said Mr Williamson, searching about in his purse. "Very odd, indeed!"

"Whose clothes were lying next to yours, sir?" asked Dunnismore.

"Kennedy's, I think."

"Mine! Yes, but I'm sure I never touched your purse," cried George quite fiercely.

"All right, Kennedy," said Mr Williamson kindly. "Nobody would ever say you had. I suppose I have been mistaken. We will say no more about it."

So we said no more about it just then; but when Mr Williamson had left us, somebody returned to the subject.

"I wonder if Paddy really had half a sovereign in his purse."

"I don't believe it," said George Kennedy. "You don't think any of us fellows would have stolen it?"

"I don't know," said Phillips, nodding and looking oracular.

"What do you mean, Jemima?"

"Well, I want to know what happened to that half-crown of mine the other day. I am almost sure I put it in my desk."

"I am a great deal surer that you chucked it out of the



window. Why, you know, Jemima, you never take care of a single blessed thing you have. You are always losing something."

, "Give me a half-crown, and see how long I take to lose it."

"How long you take to grub it, you mean. I dare say you spent this money, and forget all about it. I say, you fellows, we shall be late for the Minster if we don't look sharp."

The matter was mentioned again that evening, but nobody was in a mood to take much interest in it. For next day the whole house was in confusion; boxes and port-manteaus were lying about in all the passages; omnibuses were driving up to the door; the matron was cross and exhausted; Mrs Pearson was affectionate; and the boys were rushing about everywhere in great excitement. The Easter holidays had come at length, and there were to be no more lessons for a week, and most of us were going HOME. Hurrah!





## CHAPTER XI.

### AFTER EASTER.

**T**HE Easter holidays passed—a liberally-measured week—and back we came to Whitminster in better spirits than usual upon such occasions. For the summer quarter was looked upon as the most enjoyable part of the school year. Bathing, cricketing, and bird-nesting, somewhat shorter school-hours, more holidays—these were the attractions which made us think that school would not be such a bad place if it were always summer.

Within an hour of my arrival I made one of a group of boys assembled in Marshall's study to listen to the recital of a great adventure which had befallen him on the way to Whitminster. Marshall was a gentleman of sporting tastes, and in a second class carriage he had had the honour of meeting and smoking a pipe with no less a personage than ARUSPEX, the great racing prophet, whose infallible system of winning was advertised in all the sporting journals, and who was then on his way to Wyechester races. Finding Marshall to be a kindred spirit, this celebrity had introduced himself and condescended to bestow on our friend

some of the valuable information upon turf affairs which he was understood to keep locked in his deep mind. Marshall was delighted and showed a reverent eagerness to profit by the precepts of the sage, who, for half-a-crown paid on the spot, gave him "the straight tip" for the forthcoming race at Wyechester. Nor did his kindness nor his power of penetrating into futurity end there. It had been given him to know the name of the winner of the great Greetwell stakes, which were to be run in three weeks, as all the sporting world was aware; and in this matter also he was willing, for a small commission, to benefit his fellow-creatures. All fortunate persons acquainted with the secrets of the turf, he said, were well aware that the Duke of Doncaster's horse, Flying Dutchman, was bound to win this race, and it was only the ignorance of the general public which was the cause of twelve to one being laid against him. Any one who took the present odds was sure to realise what seemed an enormous fortune in the eyes of a fifth-form boy, and Mr Aruspex would not consider it beneath him to undertake the arrangement of the matter. So, before Marshall took leave of his new friend at Whitminster station, he had bet five pounds upon Flying Dutchman.

As he walked up to Mrs Pearson's, Marshall almost unconsciously assumed a sporting air, after the model of the great Aruspex. He cocked his hat on one side, he buttoned his coat tight, he chewed a straw, he swaggered along in true stable fashion, and, with one eye half-shut, he cunningly surveyed every cab horse on the road. Thus he arrived among us brimful of knowingness and self-satisfaction, and at once began to proclaim the mysteries into which he had just been initiated, and to urge us to take shares in his speculation.

"Of course it would be better for me if I kept it all to myself," he said ; "but I thought some of you fellows would like to go in for it with me."

Many of us were dazzled by this prospect of certain gain, and were glad to have a chance of joining in Marshall's venture. Others had more sense, and on one pretext or another refused to have anything to do with it. I took a share to the amount of, I think, five shillings ; but I was not quite sure about it at the time, and I was sorry for it when I heard George Kennedy's blunt refusal to Marshall's proposition.

"Why won't you, man? I tell you we are sure to make no end of tin."

"Sure to make no end of donkeys of yourselves. Depend upon it, this fellow is sure to make no end of tin out of you. It's all bosh, Marshall."

"Is it?" cried Marshall, much offended ; "you'll be sorry afterwards that you didn't go in for a share. But I suppose Kennedy is afraid of getting into a scrape about it."

"Indeed!" said George, scornfully, disdaining to reply further to this taunt.

"Yes! what a good child we are! I say, Kennedy, didn't you promise your mammy that you wouldn't have anything to do with betting!"

"No, I didn't," said George, colouring up. "But I promised my father, if it would do you any good to know. He says betting is very foolish, and I think so too."

"I don't know what has come over you, Kennedy. You are getting to be a regular soft," growled Marshall.

But this remark was lost on George, for he and I had gone off with Lessing to inspect a curiosity of literature, to wit, the Monkey's holiday task, which he had written on a

large card in characters so small that it seemed the master would require a microscope to read it. This idea of combining instruction with amusement was just like Lessing ; but we ventured to prophesy that the joke would not be appreciated by the authorities. Lessing himself appeared to think it very likely, but he refused to disquiet himself by inquiry into the future, and by way of enjoying the present produced some oranges. When we had assisted him to bury all care and gloomy forebodings in orange peel, we took our leave and went on to visit the studies of such of our other friends as might have arrived.

First we went to Phillips, who received us with much politeness and entertained us with gingerbread biscuits, as well as by a private performance of an epic poem which he had been writing in the holidays. The subject was the voyage of the *Æronauts*, and the metre was that of Longfellow's "Evangeline." It was to consist of twelve books, each two hundred lines long, and of these three were finished. Phillips, like other authors, was easily induced to give us a specimen of his work. Having carefully locked the door, he began to spout, while we sat by and munched the biscuits and shied crumbs at his canary. We grew rather tired of it, and the biscuits came to an end, and then luckily Phillips was sent for by the matron when he had got into the middle of the second book. So we left his study, and called upon his neighbour Balbus.

Balbus was grown a tremendous fellow now, twice the size of his brother Tom, and faint whiskers were beginning to fringe his round and placid countenance. Under these circumstances he had given up his childish passion for knives, and taken to zoological pursuits. The half before, he had had a perfect army of pets. He began with rabbits

and white mice, but the rabbits were stolen, and the white mice fell victims to a cat who was reconnoitring in the schoolroom and had certain injuries to avenge upon the inhabitants thereof. I must not omit to mention that for about a week he kept some horsehairs in a tub of water, in the firm conviction that they would turn into eels. Then he went in for ferrets, but they were prohibited by the authorities. The next thing Balbus got was a young hawk, which he tried to feed upon lettuce leaves and which naturally enough died, though not until it had bitten the fingers of most of the boys in the house. After its lamented decease, its master purchased a spaniel, which he successfully maintained in the fives' court till one day when it got among Mrs Pearson's chickens, and made such havoc that it was solemnly expelled after being publicly flogged by the gardener. This term Balbus was resolved to console himself for the loss of his former favourites, and he had accordingly brought with him a young owl in a bandbox, which we found him exhibiting to an admiring circle of friends. Master owl was rolling his head about and blinking his eyes, and seemed quite contented with his new lot; but while a discussion was going on as to whether Balbus would be allowed to keep him in the studies, he improved the occasion of the door being left open and made an excursion out to the staircase. A chase ensued, in which we all took part; and at length, by the aid of a broom fetched from the kitchen, as well as several books, pillows, and other missile weapons, our friend was captured, and borne screeching and scratching back to Balbus' den, to be hastily incarcerated in the bandbox for fear Mr Willoughby or the matron should find him out.

Then came tea, and after tea we went out into the play-

ground and had a game of prisoner's base, and rejoiced in the lengthened evening which was an earnest of the coming pleasures of summer. From this about eight or nine of us were summoned to Mr Willoughby's room; we were the boys who had given in our names as wishing to go up for Confirmation this summer.

Red and hot, and perhaps feeling somewhat disgusted at the prospect of a lecture, we obeyed the summons. We expected to be heard our Catechism or something of that sort. Mr Vialls' ideas of religious instruction had gone no further, and we were rather surprised when Mr Willoughby began the first of a series of lectures which he intended to give us twice a week till the day of the confirmation.

I often think how we sat there in the dying light of a spring evening and heard the few simple words in which our master urged us to remember the importance of the step we were about to take, and the necessity of taking it in a right spirit. His manner was a little constrained and nervous, but there was something in his tone which made us understand that he was in earnest, and forced us to listen more attentively than we did to most instruction of the kind. Perhaps we were softened by the home influences so recently left behind; perhaps unwontedly serious thoughts of our own, or admonitions of our parents, had prepared us for reverent consideration of this subject. As we listened we could not but rise for a moment above the petty thoughts and interests of schoolboy life, and for a moment felt something of respect at least for the higher standard by which we were now being urged to live. That low quiet voice in the twilight taught us to think as we may have never thought before.

"Don't think," he said, and we felt that he was saying it

from his heart—"don't think that I am saying this to you only because it is my business to say it. And don't think that I am speaking thus to you as being better than you. Not better in God's sight, only a few years older, and so perhaps a little wiser and more able to understand what things in this world are really good and really evil. What I am asking you to do is to resolve in your hearts that you will try to find and to follow what is really good—to serve God."

When Mr Willoughby dismissed us we went quietly into the gas-lit schoolroom without speaking to each other. There the noise and play of our companions called us back to our own world before long. A new boy was cutting up a remarkably large cake, and I dare say most of us joined the crowd who were scrambling round him. For the time we forgot these novel and strange impressions.

I am judging of the others as of myself. I know that what Mr Willoughby had said did not wholly pass from my mind. I thought of his words as I lay in bed that night, and at other quiet moments, and through them my boyish prayers were less formal and more sincere than they had too often been. And George thought of them, too, or I misunderstood him. What else did it mean when he laid both his hands on my shoulders, and his blue honest eyes looked into mine, and he said—

"I say, old fellow, we mustn't have any more rows this half."

George and I were the good geniuses of each other's lives; the purest aspirations of each were rooted in the other's love. He was the brother of my friend; I had been the friend of his brother. That memory of the dead which had joined our hands in friendship, had power, too,



to check his headstrong nature and spur on my cowardliness. Who could have known Harry and loved him and forgotten why he was so to be loved?

"Go on with your story!" some impatient reader will exclaim at this point. "Why waste time with such a chapter as the present? What is the meaning of it? You begin by talking about betting and horse races, then, just as we are expecting some fun out of this subject, you go wandering among the boys' studies, apparently uncertain which of them to settle in for an adventure, and when you get out into the playground, and we are about to enjoy ourselves, you are called off to a stupid lecture. You invite us to wait at the door while you are listening to this, and you come out talking very sentimentally, and giving us to understand that you had conceived a greater respect for this inexperienced young master who ought to have been made the fool or the knave of the story. What are you about?"

Indeed, gentle reader, you have cause to be dissatisfied. If you are puzzled by the way in which my story is tacking about, it is because I am not sure how to steer. It has come into a difficulty which is easier explained than overcome. So, for the moment I lay down the pen and take off the mask, and by word of mouth proceed to tell you the cause of my embarrassment.

I want to show how George Kennedy began to find what all must find who would be wise and good, that he had an enemy to fight against—an enemy more strong and dangerous than ever fought with fist or sword—an enemy whom we see daily entrapping, defeating, binding the bravest—an enemy whose stronghold is in our own hearts. At the best, I can tell such a tale but very imperfectly, for who can read into the most secret soul of a boy, simple

and frank and friendly though he be? Who can, beneath the careless laugh and the glow of animal spirits, discover and describe the half unconscious resolve, the warm emotion that cools in an hour and yet perhaps leaves a blessing behind it, the feeble movings of a new-born sense of duty that is so stifled and surrounded by the chains of selfishness and habit? Is this easy? "A boy's will is the wind's will;" it is moved and led and driven by every random current. In his heart the beginnings of healthy spiritual life are hidden and nourished, slowly most often and unseen, by the miraculous hand of nature, by ties of family and friendship, by lessons of example and warning, by sorrows and joys that fall as gentle dew and not as ruining storm or fierce heat. Thus wisdom takes root amid thoughtlessness and folly, and grows from day to day, and not yet brings forth ripe fruit or eye-pleasing flowers. How then to fix on the source of a boy's repentance or describe the course of his amendment? If George himself scarcely knew what at that critical time of life was passing in the sacredest depths of his being, how can I put all these embryo passions, hopes, reflections, on the stage, or even as chorus rightly interpret what passes within?

One thing may be known for certain, that the drama of such a life is not in most cases what may be called dramatic. It is easy enough for a writer to weave together strong passions, striking scenes, violent emotion, notable penitence. But he who would describe the common-place life of ordinary men, women, and schoolboys, must be content to take his materials as he finds them, and faithfully to present them to the reader, and patiently to hear the disapproval of all who cannot appreciate the most life-like puppets, unless a blue light be burning at the side scenes. Yet these every-

day plays are not devoid of the most powerful interest, if we know and love the life which in them is represented. Without shriek, or dagger, or horror of sudden death, are the saddest of tragedies enacted daily among us, and only anointed eyes perceive that by our side a soul has been done to death, perhaps with a smile on its lips, and with no sound to startle the ear, unless it be a shout of triumph that too late sinks into a groan of despair. Can aught be more terrible than such tragedies, or aught more common, or aught more hard to act upon any stage before the eyes of wise and foolish?

The scrapes that George got into were small ones; the fights that he fought may be called small ones; his enemies may be thought of little account; there was nothing very striking about his school life. Day after day he seemed to pass in much the same uninteresting way; there was little of importance in these days—except that perhaps he was then determining the whole course of his after life for good or evil. You schoolboys don't think much of these small outbursts of disobedience, selfishness, pettishness. You try to laugh at scoldings and punishments, and you do not believe what you are so often told, that your becoming good and happy and manly men depends mainly upon your learning as boys to exercise submission and patience and self-control. For if hereafter you would learn these lessons unlearned in boyhood, you must be taught them by whips of scorpions, and long weary hours of toil in which memories of Delectus and Euclid shall seem sweet. Never again shall you have less harsh schooling than that of the most brutal of schoolmasters. No impositions are so bitter as those which in sport or earnest we set for ourselves. No rods sting like those which we make with our own hands.

You smile incredulously ; you do not believe this now ; but some day you will *know* —— !

Enough of this. I am getting out of the depth of most juvenile minds. Older readers may see what is making me pause, and may understand what kind of scene I should find it convenient to introduce. But such a scene would be untrue to nature, and might seem to some eyes strangely set in the parti-coloured surroundings of schoolboy life, which I have undertaken to describe as it is, not as some people think it ought to be. Whatever boys do, duty, fear, anger, fun, sports, scrapes, such are the contents of the present volume. And if boys are seldom serious for an hour together, how can their faithful historian be so ? So I leave moralising, and return to the chronicle of our monotonous school days.





## CHAPTER XII.

### ANOTHER SCRAPE.

**A**FTER Easter Mr Willoughby was much more firm in his seat than he had been before. We had got more accustomed to him, and he had got more accustomed to us. We saw more clearly that he meant to have his way, and he saw more clearly how to have it. He didn't talk so much as he did at first, which had been our chief objection to him; and as he learned to enforce his precepts by deeds rather than words, we exhibited less and less of the unruliness which had been his chief objection to us. And though we had at first been amused and astonished by the "fuss," as we called it, which he made about our delinquencies, his way of dealing with them had its due effect in the end. We grew far more cautious about deserving punishments, when we found that the infliction of them really seemed to give pain to him as well as to us. We could not help respecting him, when we saw how conscientious and vigorous he was in maintaining discipline, while it evidently cost him quite an effort even to say a harsh word. The fact was that to make an excellent

master Mr Willoughby wanted nothing but a little more knowledge of human nature, and—shall I say?—a little less trustfulness in schoolboy nature.

This trustfulness had been considerably nipped by the cold realities of his first few weeks' experience as a ruler of boys ; but when after the Easter holidays he found us all behaving with such propriety that nobody got into a single scrape for the first week, it began to bud again. At the end of this time he assembled the boys and made a speech in which he congratulated us on the arrival of a scholastic millennium. He was sure, he said, that in time our good sense and right feeling would relieve him from the disagreeable duty of severity. He took for granted that this was quite a settled matter, and that from henceforth we were to live together most pleasantly and friendly. That we might see how much better this would be for both parties, he entered into the philosophy of the relations between master and pupil, and was at great pains to convince us that it was his part to give orders and ours to obey willingly, a doctrine which we were never disposed to doubt, so long as it remained in a theoretic form. Some of us opened our eyes when he expressed a fear that he was sometimes too hasty and passionate in his dealings with us ; but for the future he would try to keep a guard over himself. For his guidance as well as for ours, he had drawn up a code of rules, which he now read out to us, explaining and defending each one, and pointing out the benefit that would result from our observance of it. Punishments he hoped would be unnecessary, but if such stimulus should be required, the culprit was to be invited to choose any form of punishment he pleased, and to suffer it cheerfully for his own good.

The millennium soon came to an end. Marshall made a

bet that Abbing would get into a scrape before a week was over, and won. The copies of the rules which Mr Willoughby had neatly written out and pasted up in the dining hall, schoolroom, and dormitories, were derided and scribbled over, and otherwise treated disrespectfully ; nor was their meaning more regarded. After fairly attempting to support the new constitution upon a meagre diet of remonstrance and rebuke, Mr Willoughby was obliged to invite some persistent delinquents to select a punishment. Before long one of Lessing's pranks disgusted our master with this new mode of carrying on discipline. The Monkey's good sense and right feeling had not prevented him from coming late to breakfast three mornings running, and on the fourth he was asked what kind of infliction would be effectual to put a stop to this laziness. Lessing chose to write a hundred lines, and in the course of the day presented himself before Mr Willoughby with eighty-nine lines and a half, and said that he had changed his mind and would take 1

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Vallombrosa of rods could have done to touch his heart, and how loving and earnest rebukes had called forth sincere promises of amendment, not made, perhaps, without tears. George was not a fellow to cry about nothing; and if he made a promise he meant to keep it. Then, he seemed to be thinking more seriously than most of us about the approaching confirmation, and this increased rather than wore away at each of Mr Willoughby's lectures which we attended. He did not show any of his former dislike to the new master, but spoke to him and of him more respectfully. I noticed this. I also noticed that he kept his temper under better control; and everybody might notice that he now learned his lessons regularly, and was more careful to obey the rules, and that I followed his example, and that we didn't get into a single scrape—not till three weeks had passed, and then it was through Balbus' owl.

That unlucky fowl was always getting its owner into trouble. If it did not escape in the course of the day, it was pretty sure to make a horrible row through the night and bring down upon the head of Balbus the wrath of all the boys who slept near. The matron found it out and every morning threatened to tell Mr Willoughby unless it were taken away. Balbus was faithful to it for a time; but it soon began to get out of favour and was discarded for a young family of Java rats, which our friend had procured at great expense and established in an old writing-desk. He thereupon proposed to sell the owl to one of the day-boys; but while the negotiation was still in progress, he was foolish enough to leave his pets together in his study for ten minutes without taking proper precautions for their security. When he came back he found that the desk had been upset, and that Master Owl had avenged the slight put upon him,



by eating one or two of its rivals. The rest had got off to some other room, and there founded a colony which in due time spread all over the house. Thereupon the usually placid Balbus was wroth, and proposed to cane the murderous bird as it sat calmly surveying the scene of the bloody deed and digesting its late repast. The novelty of this proceeding did not strike the owl so much as its unpleasantness. With much screeching and scratching it fled, and finding an open window, got out of the house, and thus Balbus was left lamenting over all his pretty ones. But at the end of three days the bird of Minerva was unwise enough to present itself in the covered fives' court, where it was chased, captured, and triumphantly carried back to its prison in the band-box.

One night we had gone to bed with less noise than generally attended that ceremony, for it had been a half-holiday, and, if I remember right, we had been out at hare and hounds, and most of us were tired and disposed for nothing but sleep. I promised the reader that I was going to get into a scrape, and he may be disappointed to find me safely and quietly tucked up beneath the blankets, and beginning to doze off, and lazily thinking, if it could be called thinking, about rather a strange subject. Just before supper Tom Cane had been reading to us from some American paper an account of a spiritualist séance, then a novelty in England; and though the matter was treated as a ridiculous imposture in the account, it had left a certain uneasy impression in my mind, and if I had fallen asleep just then, it would perhaps have been to dream of weird hands, mysterious raps, tables dancing, chairs walking, and such like genteel evidences of drawing-room supernaturalism, which in a refined nineteenth century have supplanted the

coarse skull and cross-bone horrors of "once upon a time."

But before I passed into the land of dreams, I was startled by hearing close to me one or two raps of the kind I had imagined. I opened my eyes for a moment, then shut them again and listened. There could be no mistake about it; another couple of soul-appalling raps greeted my attentive ears. I knew it was foolish of me and did not like to confess my weakness to any one, but I could not help half sitting up in bed and looking in the direction from which the noise seemed to come. As I did so, a cold wind passed over my face, and a cold shudder ran through me. I shrank back on my pillow, and my heart beat fast and faster as I distinctly saw—oh, horror!—a ghastly, gigantic hand moving in the darkness and coming towards me. My impulse was to bury myself under the blankets; but before I could do so, something white and soft and dreadful flopped up against my face. I could no longer contain myself, but sprang out of bed with a loud scream.

Instantly all was in commotion. I ran towards the door, stumbling over a water jug which stood in my way, and dragging down a chair in a vain attempt to save myself from falling. Half the fellows jumped up, uttering exclamations of wrath or astonishment, and in various tones demanded the meaning of this howling and smashing.

Abbing thought some one was coming to play him a trick, and flying to arms discharged both his slippers with deadly aim, so far as noise went, for one of them banged up against the door, and the other struck Beesley full on the nose, and caused him to emit a roar of wrath and anguish. George Kennedy began to turn on his bed and mutter, "Run it out!" Balbus snored on peacefully and loudly.

And above all was heard a harsh, unearthly screeching, that seemed to come from the ceiling and soon made the other boys as awake and alarmed as myself. Jemima was the first who succeeded in getting to the door, and as soon as it was opened a little light from the gas in the passage glimmered into the room ; then, the noise having ceased for a moment, something grey and round was seen gliding about over our heads.

“ I declare, Balbus, there’s that brute of yours again ! ”

And in fact, just then, there proceeded from this alarming object another screech in which we had no difficulty in recognising the voice of Cane’s feathered friend, who had come out for an evening’s amusement and had caused all this row by his silent and stealthy ways of moving about in the dark. Or I should rather say that, as we found out afterwards, a mischievous little wretch from one of the other dormitories had purloined the beast from the bandbox which was its secluded home, and introduced it among us, entering our room in the dark under the pretence of borrowing a sponge.

The first thing we did was to have a good laugh at our own alarms, and be sure I was not spared, though I kept my account of the matter to myself, feeling quite as foolish as I had any wish to do. The next proceeding was to chase the intruder, an exciting sport which we had frequently the pleasure of enjoying, and which was the only reason we tolerated it in our society. This time the run was short and sharp. The animal was knocked down by a pillow, and secured and handed back to its master, who proceeded to lecture it on its wilfulness and ingratitude and to threaten that it should be birched and expelled publicly if he had to speak to it again. Then he proposed, in defiance of the

rules, to slip downstairs and consign the ruffian to its paste-board dungeon, and, for no particular reason that I can remember, George and I must needs put on our trousers and accompany him.

We reached the studies undetected, and consigned our feathered prisoner to the bandbox, putting a heavy dictionary on the top as a precaution against his getting free. Then the wisest thing would have been to go back at once, but we didn't do the wisest thing. There was a light in one of the senior boys' studies, and when we went up to the door of it we were aware of a strong smell of tobacco and of the voices of Marshall and Tom Cane.

"Marshall is smoking at the window. I say, isn't he cool? If Willoughby should take it into his head to visit the studies!"

"I'll frighten him," whispered Balbus, and gave a sudden knock and said in as gruff a voice as he could—

"Open the door, this instant!"

The alarm and confusion of those inside were quite audible, but they were not long in recognising that Balbus' voice was not magisterial enough, and after a whispered consultation, there came back the reply—

"You young fool, what do you mean?"

We only heard thus much and that the speaker had laid his hand on the key; then we fled chuckling, just in time to escape a boot which came flying past us, and found ourselves once more on the dormitory staircase.

As Mr Willoughby had not presented himself, we settled that he must be out of the way. So evidently thought the inmates of the small boys' rooms, for they had a light inside and were at high jinks. We paid them a visit and found a great exhibition going on. The young Woods had

been to a circus in the holidays and had come back with their heads full of it ; and now the whole performance was being gone through, with horses, riders, acrobats, clown, and all the rest of it. We, as visitors from one of the senior rooms, were received with great respect, and condescended to patronise the entertainment. We looked on with applause while the Bounding Brothers of the Bosphorus, known in private life as Masters Ned and Harold Wood, or otherwise, "Firewood" and "Touchwood," went through their unrivalled gymnastic feats. After this the hilarity of the proceedings was interrupted by a violent dispute between the clown and the master of the ring as to the quantity and quality of the whipping which the latter, in his theatrical character, was entitled to bestow upon the former. In fact, if we had not interfered, there would have been a fight between these important performers, and their disagreement put a stop to the whole affair. Besides, some of the more prudent were getting nervous about the noise, so the gas was turned out, and we strangers proceeded to find our way back to our own dormitory.

We had only gone a yard along the passage—a yard, but scarcely two—when we heard steps and saw a light. We stopped for a moment, long enough to lose all chance of escape, and as we were hesitating, there appeared at a turn of the stairs above, Mr Willoughby with a candle in his hand.

In this emergency, we three acted in accordance with our natures. I started back behind the still open door of the dormitory, Balbus following ; George had already begun to move on, and when he saw an encounter was inevitable he coughed as if to show that he was not trying to hide himself.

"Kennedy, you ought not to be here!"

"I came down to the studies about something, sir."

"There was some one with you?"

"No, sir," said George.

We did not catch this denial in time, but as soon as we heard what Mr Willoughby said, we thought it was not right to leave Kennedy alone in the scrape, or that it would not be safe to remain concealed any longer, or that—at all events, first I and then Cane came out from behind the door, and would have given anything to have stayed there when we found how our appearance put George to confusion. He cast his eyes to the ground when he saw the surprised and reproachful look which was turned upon him. Our faces would have been a study for a painter. The master pained at detecting a falsehood, George ashamed at being caught in one, Balbus and I feeling unpleasantly conscious that it was all our fault.

"You should have stayed where you were," said Mr Willoughby, with an unwonted touch of sarcasm in his voice. "I *had* such faith in Kennedy's word that I should not have thought of looking for you, though my impression was that there had been more than one boy in the passage."

We did not know what to say, and Mr Willoughby seemed to be equally at a loss. After a minute he told us to go to bed and speak to him next morning.

Really Balbus and I wished we could have found some way of taking all the blame on our own shoulders. We had broken a rule, that was a small matter, but George had got into serious trouble by telling a lie to screen us, and though it was quite an accident that we had betrayed him, we overwhelmed ourselves with reproaches and with apologies—there now!—that's what comes of reading other people's

stories !—I mean to say, in schoolboy English, we told him that we were awfully sorry.

Like a little gentleman that he was, he tried to reassure us and to make light of the affair, but I saw that he did not make light of it to himself. When we got back into our dormitory, some of the other fellows, who had heard Mr Willoughby's voice, were anxious to know what had happened ; but though we told the story in full and did not hide our unfortunate share in it, George gave the briefest explanations, and seemed unwilling to speak of the matter. He was evidently annoyed but not snappish as I had seen him before under similar circumstances, and he did not even answer when Abbing said—

“Why, Kennedy, I thought you were so high-flying and honourable, and all that sort of thing. Won't you catch it for telling a lie, though !”

“Well, it's one thing to tell a lie to get another fellow out of a scrape, and another thing to tell the sort of lies you do,” cried I warmly, taking up the cudgels for George.

Abbing was the only one of us who wasn't sorry for George ; and I don't say he wasn't a little sorry, but he was also a small bit glad, perhaps. For, two or three evenings before, when we were having a little quiet and sociable bolstering together, the false alarm of “wolf !” had been raised ; and whereas some boys confined themselves to the mild deception of sitting on their beds and looking innocent, Abbing plumped down on his knees and began to say his prayers with great earnestness. Then George Kennedy gave him a kick, and said—

“Get up and don't try that low dodge ; 't isn't right, Abbing.”

George's influence was quite strong enough to make the

rest of us agree with the doctrine thus forcibly propounded, but Abbing resented this interference with his devotions ; so it may be understood why he chuckled a little when his severe censor was himself found a step or so astray from the strict path of truthfulness.

When I say the fellows were sorry for George, I am using too strong an expression, perhaps. They sympathised with him as much as schoolboys do sympathise with each other in like case, but they did not understand with what unusual dread he looked forward to a severe punishment, and, worse, to a long "jaw." I understood how he wished to gain Mr Willoughby's good opinion, and I heartily sympathised with him as we stood in the "Chamber of Horrors" next morning, without a word to say for ourselves.

"I suppose," Mr Willoughby said, "I may take it for granted that you three are aware that you were breaking rules last night, and that one of you acknowledges telling me what was not the truth."

"I didn't think about its not being true, sir," said George hastily ; "I oughtn't to have said it."

"I was sure you would think so, upon reflection," said Mr Willoughby kindly. "I have been thinking over the matter, also, and I am not sure that I behaved quite rightly. I ought not to have asked you a question which you could not answer without betraying your companions. Still, Kennedy, you ought not to have told me a lie—for it was a lie—and it would have deceived me if these boys had not come forward. I am glad to see you feel this."

Kennedy looked up reassured. We had been accustomed to find Mr Willoughby dealing very severely with anything like falsehood, and the lenient view he seemed to be taking of George's fault surprised us.



"This is a case in which it is hard to decide what ought to be done. On the one hand, you spoke on the impulse of the moment—you meant to act kindly by your friends; I assure you, Kennedy, I can sympathise with your intention. On the other hand, nothing should be allowed to excuse a departure from truth. It is a question whether you ought to be punished. Fortunately, I have seen that you would not tell a lie to get yourself out of trouble, so I think I need only show you that it is wrong to tell a lie even for any one else's sake, and I hope you will make up your mind to act upon this principle in future. Do you understand me, Kennedy?"

"Yes, sir; I won't do it again," said George sincerely.

"That's right. Now, you must each write a hundred lines for being out of your dormitory."

Balbus and I at this began to back out of the room. Mr Willoughby desired George to stay, and they had a talk together for nearly a quarter of an hour. George never told me what the master said to him; but after that day he and Mr Willoughby seemed to understand one another.





## CHAPTER XIII.

### A MYSTERY.

**I**F there was one young gentleman in Mrs Pearson's house who thought himself superior to his fellow-creatures in manliness, spirit, and sagacity, it was Mr Marshall. To tell the truth, he was somewhat stupid, rather greedy, and a bit of a bully ; but then he was a tall, sturdy, good-looking and not ill-humoured fellow, possessed of certain talents and accomplishments which gave him a position in our society. By this time readers with any knowledge of schoolboy nature will understand Marshall as well as I can describe him. It will also be understood that at school he had not full scope for his talents and energies, and could only prove his manliness by such dashing acts as the fearful smoking of bad cigars in out-of-the-way corners or under damp hedges, and the occasional sneaking into a public-house. But even in such an uncongenial scene, Marshall aspired to show forth all the shining qualities of a fast youth.

This ambition had hitherto, perhaps, been a somewhat indefinite one, but his meeting with the celebrated Aruspex

gave it strength and form. Henceforward Marshall turned his great mind to that institution known as the Turf. He bought a betting book, began to take in a sporting paper, and could talk of nothing but plates, and handicaps, and colts, and the Derby, and all the rest of it. And as he was a person of some consequence in our little world, his example was imitated by as many boys as had any money and not much sense to spare, and were minded to be in the fashion. So for a time there was quite a rage for betting among us. Fellows bet not only upon horse races, but upon games and places in school, about whether we should have a holiday on such and such a day, about whether so and so would get a caning or an imposition, about whether Mr Williamson would lose his temper, about whether Mrs Pearson would wear her best or her second best cap, about whether—but I may as well go on to say that this fashion began to die out when some of the boys had lost most of the money they brought back to school, without having anything to show for it. There was still, however, a sect of devotees who sat at the feet of Marshall and heard him deliver oracles as to forthcoming “events,” and confidently looked forward to making what they knowingly called “a pot of money” upon the “Greetwell stakes” and other races, on which they had the benefit of Aruspex’s valuable advice. Of course, about all this nothing was said to the masters, though it was rumoured that two of them, Mr Williamson and Mr Young, had made a strange bet between themselves on the Greetwell stakes. They had agreed, we came to learn, that whichever of them lost should, till midsummer, keep all the detentions that would have fallen to the lot of the other. But very likely this story was not true.

Marshall had so thoroughly persuaded himself of his own sagacity in these affairs, that it was doubly disgusting to him when he found that he could do nothing but lose his money. Not only did some small speculations which he had made on his own judgment prove in almost every case unfortunate, but the great Aruspex's "straight tip" for the Wyecheester race turned out to be anything but a valuable piece of information. Then Marshall began to have misgivings. He did not communicate them to his friends, but privately wrote a respectfully-reproachful letter to Aruspex, and in due course received a reply with which he tried to content himself. The prophet's letter consisted of a printed circular, which stated that, though turf speculation was commonly supposed to be a most hazardous operation, the well-known and tried system of Aruspex had reduced the chance of gaining to a practical certainty, and that his numerous patrons and the public might rely on receiving confidential and valuable information which would secure them against loss and give them the opportunity of making large profits. At the foot of this a few scrawled and badly spelt lines furthermore assured Mr Marshall that, though by an extraordinary piece of bad luck the Wyecheester race had gone wrong and misled all the most knowing members of the turf, he might undoubtedly depend on Flying Dutchman for the Greetwell. So Marshall announced to the boys whom he had induced to take shares in his speculation on this race, and he sincerely hoped it would prove true, but I should think his faith in Aruspex was now not so strong as it had been. It disappeared altogether when the Greetwell stakes were run for, and Flying Dutchman came in nowhere.

Marshall was extremely vexed, and so were his clients.

They upbraided him, and he upbraided Aruspex. But a letter to the mysterious sage only brought a short answer to the effect that, as he had lost heavily himself by this unexpected result of the Greetwell, he would be obliged if Mr Marshall would forward five pounds by return of post.

So not only were Marshall's hopes of gain dispelled, but he had the humiliation of explaining to his fellow speculators that his knowing friend, his infallible prophet, the great Aruspex, whom he had talked about and quoted and boasted of, was a swindler, or at least a humbug. Great was the wrath of these deluded victims, and it was proposed to take no notice of the letter or flatly to refuse payment; but for that at least Aruspex had showed himself too sharp. His communication contained a very plain hint that if the money were not sent our master should be informed of the whole transaction, and this was not to be thought of; so with wrathful reluctance, Marshall & Co. found themselves compelled to make up the sum among them and send it off to Aruspex's "chambers" in London.

"You see there is nothing for it," said Marshall to his fellow-speculators. "We must pay, or we shall get into a nice scrape. That Aruspex is about the biggest blackguard I ever saw."

"I wish you had found that out sooner," grumbled one of the deceived ones. "You told me we were sure to win a lot of money."

"So we were; but accident," said another. "I can help being taken in these days I shall have the head for him. In the money. Come along; for I want five shillings for

"Look here, Marshall, I'll pay you another time."

"Indeed you won't; you'll pay me now."

"But I haven't got any money."

"Then you are a horrid cad. No fellow makes bets when he hasn't money to pay them. You deserve to be kicked by the whole school."

"Well, I can't help it," whimpered Wood. "I had five shillings or more the other day, but I don't know what became of them. I can't remember where I put them; and anyhow I haven't got them now."

"None of your humbug! You don't come over me with your stories, young Wood."

"Upon my honour, Marshall, I have lost all my money. I believe some fellow has bagged it."

"Oh, yes! very likely!"

"Indeed, Marshall, some one must have taken it; and other fellows have lost money, too, lately. My brother had some stamps taken out of his desk, and another of the cubs missed a shilling yesterday."

"Who was it? Who says he missed a shilling?" cried Marshall in such a tone that nobody felt inclined to announce himself as the unfortunate person. "Of course! I knew it was all humbug. I don't know what a fellow deserves who goes about trying to persuade us that there is a thief in the school. Look here, young Wood, I am going upstairs to get some tin out of my desk, and while I am away you and the other fellows had better find money somewhere or other, and pay up your shares, or——"

Marshall did not require to clench his fist to explain the meaning of this last little word. Young Wood was evidently alarmed, and once more began to plead his cause——

"Don't jaw, I tell you," roared Marshall, turning round.

"I have a good mind to lick you straight off for not having any money, and I will give you a fearful hiding, if you say again that anybody here steals anything. Just let me catch the next fellow who talks about stealing! A nice story, indeed! As if we were all a pack of thieves!"

Growling thus, Marshall retired to his study, and presently came bouncing down the stairs three at a time, and burst into the room which he had just quitted, in such a red-hot state of fury and excitement that everybody jumped up at the very sight of him.

"I say!"

"What's the matter?"

"Matter! Here's a fellow broken into my desk and taken out a sovereign. Isn't that matter enough?"

"No!"

"No! Do you mean to say I am telling a lie," bellowed Marshall, turning upon the indiscreet sympathiser. "I tell you it's true, and if I could catch the brute I'd break every bone in his sneaking body. I must catch him—I shall catch him! A pretty thing, indeed, if we are to have thieves among us. It's a disgrace to the school. It's horrible. It's—it's—it's—a beastly thing."

"I should like to say something, but I daren't," said Lessing.

"What do you mean, you fool?"

"Why, Marshall, you told us you were going to do dreadful things to the first fellow who spoke——"

"Hold your tongue, you idiot, and say what you have got to say."

"Well, I was going to say that there must be some truth in these other stories about stealing after all. I think we should get all the fellows together and talk it over."

"Of course we should, and we shall. Go out, young Hobson, into the fields and the fives' court and tell the fellows to come at once. Tell them I said so. Beesley, go to Ellis' study and ask him to come down. Stop here, all you fellows, till the rest come. I'll just write a line to that swindler and tell him we'll send his money in a day or two. I shouldn't mind giving twice as much to get at the fellow who broke open my desk. I never heard of such a thing."

In two or three minutes the other boys came flocking in, and we resolved ourselves into a court of investigation, the labours of which were destined to extend over many weeks.

There was no doubt about money having been stolen. No sooner had Marshall announced the disappearance of his sovereign than Dunnismore discovered that he had lost five shillings in much the same way. And as soon as the boys had heard of these losses, they all began to remember something or other which they had missed or had heard of as missing. Clearly a thief had got among us, and clearly what was to be done was to discover who he was.

But this was easier said than done. There was no clue to even the time or manner of the theft. Marshall was positive that he had left the money in his desk; the exact day he was not sure of; and when he happened to look for it a week or two afterwards, it was gone. The lock was a simple one which anyone could open; the desk stood in his study, to which anyone had access at almost all hours of the day. Dunnismore's money had been in his play-box, the lock of which had been broken for some time. Three fives balls, he said, and a can of pickled lobster, had also been taken out of it.

These were articles which the servants were not likely to



have meddled with ; besides, all of them had been for some time in Mrs Pearson's service, and no suspicion of their honesty had ever arisen. On the other hand, they had more opportunities of being alone in the boys' rooms during school hours. A boy would have far greater difficulty in opening another's desk and play-box without being detected. But this was all that could be said—said to any purpose, that is, for in the first excitement of the matter, everybody had something to say that was more or less not worth listening to. Some boys looked mysterious and hinted that they could and they would tell something of the greatest importance ; others eagerly came forward with pieces of evidence which generally turned out to have nothing to do with the matter ; so much, indeed, was talked about it, that what was at first a puzzling affair, became every day more hard to understand. Then, when once it had been proved that two or three small thefts had taken place, there were ever so many boys who remembered or imagined that they had lost this or that in such and such a strange manner, and though any one with a grain of sense might have seen that most of these stories were exaggerated, it was impossible to say how far they might or might not be true.

It was not exactly a pleasant idea that we had a thief living among us, yet I believe that on the whole many of us rather enjoyed the excitement and mystery of wondering who he was. Tom Cane undertook the chief part in our investigation, if investigation it could be called, and here Caius was in his element. He looked forward to being a lawyer, and cherished hopes that he might even be found equal to the romantic duties of a detective. Here was an unexpected chance of distinguishing himself in both capacities. It was grand to hear him cross-examining

witnesses, weighing evidence, and suggesting theories as to how the crime had been committed. But no result came of his labours, except that all the unpopular boys in the house were one by one brought under suspicion. There was not a fragment of real proof against any one. Nor was he more successful in his police duties, though he went the length of hiding marked money in various secret places, and of organising a nightly watch in the school-room. It was arranged that two boys at a time were to take this duty, and the first night Cane set the example by sitting up with Dunnismore till two in the morning. The next night the watch caught cold; the third, two small boys who were pressed into the service, made a fire in the grate and fell asleep over it; and then it began to strike these amateur detectives that the thief was not likely to show himself when he was aware of the preparations made for his reception. So the watch was given up as useless, and the three shillings which Cane had invested in a most business-looking dark lantern were found to be thrown away.

It will be wondered why we did not speak to Mr Willoughby about the thefts. This was evidently the best thing to do, and many of us would have done it. Ellis, Kennedy, and others proposed it at once; but there were reasons against them. Marshall was afraid that his betting transactions would come to light; and, though in public he professed to scout the idea, he had a suspicion that this habit which he had introduced into the school might be found to have something to do with the thefts. Tom Cane was too much pleased at making himself a person of importance in the matter to wish it to pass into other hands. Dunnismore suggested that if one of the servants were

guilty, it might be well to keep it as secret as possible that any suspicion had been caused. The end of the discussion was that their influence prevailed, and we all in public meeting assembled were adjured not to say a single word to any one about what had happened, not even to the other boys who did not belong to Mrs Pearson's house.

"It's all humbug, you know," said George, bluntly criticising these proceedings. "The more of this fuss you make, the less you'll find out. Much better tell Willoughby at once, and see what he says."

"Says! He'll have enough to say if we tell him. He will preach and jaw about it for ever and do no good. He's as stupid as an owl, is Edwyn Phillip."

"Indeed he isn't," said Ellis. "He shows himself uncommonly sharp sometimes."

"Well, it isn't any business of his," declared Marshall. "We had much better manage our own affairs. I hate running to tell a master whenever anything happens."

"So do I, generally. But this is different. I think we ought to tell about this."

"Bosh! We all know that you have got awfully good lately, Kennedy, and are trying to suck up to Willoughby."

"I'm not trying to suck up to him or anybody else," protested George, warmly.

"Well, then, don't talk nonsense about know. They will never find out and want the fellow who stole the

"No more than you do,  
heart he'll be found out  
Skinning will be too go  
beastly cad. I never  
worked up to a

moral indignation against the unknown culprit and wrath against Marshall.

George was of course not alone in his feelings and expressions of indignation. This is a virtue, if it is a virtue, which comes very easy both to boys and men ; and on the present occasion there was plenty of it at the service of the thief. I suppose most of us really felt very scornful and contemptuous towards a crime which we were conscious of no temptation to commit ; and those who did not pretended that they did, for fear of drawing suspicion on themselves by silence. At all events the unfortunate person himself was not to be envied if he heard all that was said about him and threatened against him.

Of those boys who have been mentioned as my companions, Phillips was the first who came into suspicion. Tom Cane had noticed him getting up an hour before the usual time one morning, and had at once jumped to the conclusion that this could only be to rob desks. But Phillips denied the charge most indignantly, and explained his early rising in a satisfactory way. It seemed he had an attack of poetry through the night, and had got up to commit his verses to writing before the afflatus passed away. As evidence he produced the poem—the ink scarcely dry on the paper :

“I'd love to be a Pirate Bold,  
Upon the salt sea foam,  
In search of jewels and of gold,  
In southern lands to roam.

“I long the Ocean's spray to hear,  
And see the briny breeze ;  
I long my rapid course to steer  
Across the raging seas.

“ Up goes the Black and Horrid flag,  
Unto the mainmast top ;  
My noble Bark, like to a stag,  
Upon the waves doth hop.

“ The foe appears ; we follow fast ;  
We draw the shining sword ;  
And we come up with them at last,  
And then we go on board.

“ We kill them all and them do throw  
Into the howling Deep ;  
Unto the bottom they do go,  
And there they all do sleep.

“ We take their jewels and their gold,  
And home we make our way ;  
Hurray for the plundering Pirate Bold !  
Hurray ! Hurray ! Hurray !”

The confession contained in these lines might be supposed to have raised fresh suspicion, but, on the contrary, they were accepted as a proof of Phillips' honesty. Besides, Cane got another clue just then, and, after turning the matter over in his mind, announced that the thief must be a boy called Hobson, against whom he was not long in producing an overpowering amount of evidence. Poor Hobson was much distressed at the charge, and this was taken as a further proof of its truth ; but, luckily for him, somebody remembered that when the thefts were first committed he had been out of the house, staying with an aunt, on account of illness. So he was out of the question ; and Cane's detective zeal was damped again.

Then Abbing was hinted at. Abbing had improved wonderfully of late, but he was not exactly an excellent character, and had once had the reputation of being very much the re-

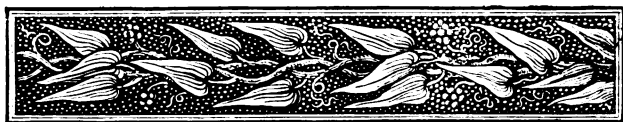
verse. So there were not wanting tongues to fix the guilt upon Abbing. The accusation, however, was found to rest upon absolutely nothing. It seemed to have been first started by Phillips; and the only reason Phillips had for it was that Abbing persisted in calling him Joseph, and therefore was in his eyes capable of any crime. When he could produce no evidence, he ceased indeed to accuse Abbing, but he wrote a tale founded on the mysterious crime, in which Abbing, under the stilettoish name of Giacomo, evidently played the part of villain, while Phillips himself was of course the hero—Albert Montmorency. These two were in love with the same young lady—Julietta. Giacomo insulted his rival, who challenged him to fight a duel. Before the duel came off the villain contrived to have the hero arrested on a false accusation of theft. He then proceeded to obtain the young lady's affections in the summary manner for which villains are remarkable. In the end it was discovered that Giacomo was the real criminal, whereupon Albert issued from prison and confronted the villain just in time to prevent his marriage with Julietta. A combat of course took place, and Giacomo of course was killed, and died of course confessing the innocence of his antagonist; then the lovers of course proceeded to live happily for the rest of their days, as all interesting and handsome lovers always do when once the curtain is let down upon their espousal.

Phillips showed this tale to some of his friends, but we did not approve of it. The allusions to real life and present circumstances were obvious and somewhat ridiculous, and we thought the matter too grave for a joke. But Phillips, failing like other geniuses to obtain encouragement in his own circle, was minded to seek the applause of a larger audience. So he copied his story out fair and sent

it to the editor of a penny magazine, in whose possession it is till this day for all I know, for it was never printed, though Phillips subscribed to the magazine regularly for a year, in hopes of seeing his production.

No! it was not Abbing. At least nothing could be proved against him, except that we could accuse nobody else with a greater show of reason. Who could it be then? And for a time this question was in our little world one of as great interest and mystery as ever were excited among our seniors by the "Letters of Junius," or the "Man in the Iron Mask."





## CHAPTER XIV.

### TRYING.

**T**HOUGH George so indignantly repudiated the charge of "sucking up" to Mr Willoughby, there was no doubt a certain amount of truth in it, or at least in what Marshall meant by it. Other people besides Marshall did not fail to notice that George Kennedy, once the dauntless leader of rebellion, had become a loyal and dutiful subject; and those who knew that he wasn't likely to be frightened out of having his own way, were perhaps a little puzzled what to make of his new-born scrupulousness. For instance, he gave up smoking—an illegal practice he had begun to indulge in a little. This may seem no great matter, but everybody who knows such a school as ours was, will understand that in a boy of his age smoking is a symptom of certain thoughts and feelings by no means desirable. At all events Mr Willoughby had been fulminating against it; and George, without waiting to be found out, gave away a box of cigarettes which he had just bought, confiding to me that after all he was very glad to be rid of them, a declaration which certain experiences



of my own inclined me heartily to agree with. It was of course from Marshall and that set that he had learned to smoke, and he seemed to have given up their company since Easter.

"Come a walk, Kennedy," said Marshall one Sunday. "I have some splendid cigars, and we are going to Landon Wood."

"I'm going out with Smith," said George.

"Oh!" said Marshall.

I understood his meaning as well as if he had put it in plain words, and was not particularly well pleased at the contemptuous view he seemed to take of me. Indeed, he had that morning done me the honour of suggesting that I was as likely as not to turn out to be the mysterious thief who had exercised our minds so much. I was rejoiced then to hear George take up the cudgels for me.

"What are you growling at, Marshall? Do you mean to say I mayn't walk with any one I like?"

"You may walk with as many idiots as you like, for all I care about it," was the rough reply, and then George was going to answer in the same strain, when Tom Cane interposed—

"There, there! You two are always barking at each other, now-a-days. No use in quarrelling about nothing."

So Marshall, Cane, and their faithful follower, Dunnismore—"the lap-dog" fellows had already begun to call him—strolled off in one direction, and I moved away in the other with Kennedy, taking his arm and feeling as if I didn't care for all the Marshalls in the world. We walked along the river bank, and our talk was of the inexhaustible subject of the stolen money. George tried to assure me that I need not trouble myself about the way in which my name had been mentioned.

"Marshall doesn't really know you did it."

"I should think not," replied I, with some warmth.

"No ; but I mean they have accused pretty nearly everybody in the house. I shouldn't wonder if they accused me next," declared George.

"Who can it be?" I asked, for the twentieth time.

"None of the fellows, I'll bet."

"But then there's nobody left but the servants, and they——"

"I don't care," said George, who, like other positive people, didn't care to listen to arguments when he had made up his mind. "I have been thinking about it, and I don't believe there's anybody in the house who would have done such a thing. Why! nobody would ever speak to him again."

"There are some of the fellows who wouldn't stick at a trifle."

"Yes, yes ; but they wouldn't steal money. A fellow may get into any amount of scrapes with the masters, and all that sort of thing, but this is different."

"I don't know," persisted I. "I think it must have been one of the fellows, and do you know I have sometimes suspected——"

"Oh! I say!" cried George. "There's a kingfisher! Look! Look! Look!"

I could see nothing except that George had suddenly grown excited, and forgetting all about thieves and suspicions, was staring intently into the steep bushy bank on the other side of the river.

"Its nest must be there. I say! I am glad we came this way. What luck, isn't it? Watch, watch! Just under the root of that willow over there. Didn't you see it go in? Look, man! There he goes again!"

This time I was aware of something brilliantly blue and green, which darted to and fro across the stream and seemed to disappear suddenly in a bush about half-way up the bank.

"That's where the nest is. Look about for a piece of stick in case I have to dig it out. Keep your eye on the place. I wonder how deep the water is," cried George, all in a breath, and running to the edge of the bank he peered into the river. "Yes. I can wade across. Isn't it jolly! How I have been wishing that I could find a kingfisher's nest!"

He had already flung himself on the ground, and was eagerly pulling off his boots, when I remarked:

"I'll just run along the bank and see that Edwyn Phillip is not coming this way. I often see him walking here on Sunday afternoons, and you know he made a row about you going after a nest on Sunday once before."

"Oh, but this is a kingfisher's! I must take this one. What an awful thing it would be if some fellow came and took it before me!"

"All right. Go ahead. I'll keep *cave*."

But George, while pulling off his second stocking, had paused.

"Is it wrong to take birds' nests on Sunday?" he said, laying down the stocking, and beginning more slowly to loosen the belt of his trousers.

"Mr Willoughby said we weren't to."

Then George buckled his belt again with a snap, and took up his shoes and stockings.

"It will do just as well to-morrow," he said. "I'm always in such a hurry. I'll tell you what: to-morrow we'll go up the other side of the river as soon as dinner is over,

and we'll borrow a rope and an axe from old Mac, and I'll get down the bank and have them out. Now, Bob, you mustn't tell a soul. If Abbing hears he will be after it, like a sly fellow that he is. I wonder how many eggs there are? Six or seven, I dare say. Aren't you glad we saw it!"

"Here's a better plan. I'll set my alarum at five o'clock, and we'll go before any of the fellows are up."

"That's the very thing!" cried George, enthusiastically. "I'll give you two of the eggs."

So this was resolved upon, and George put on his shoes and stockings, and tried to curb his impatience, and we walked home without any kingfisher's eggs in our pockets, but with our heads full of nothing else. Was I not right in saying that Mr Willoughby had some influence over George?

I am not sure that Mr Willoughby would not have thought it better to have taken the nest and have done with it, than to allow it to occupy our minds so much. We thought and talked about it all the rest of the day, and before we went to bed we had made interest with Mrs Bramble to be allowed to let ourselves out before the rest of the household was stirring, borrowed a rope and an axe from Macduff, the old gardener, and made all our other arrangements. The last and not the least of these was the setting of my alarum clock, which I had lately acquired from Dunnismore in payment of a bet we were fools enough to make about I forget what. Unacquainted as yet with the eccentric character of this instrument, I still looked upon it with some complacency, and indeed, as far as looking went, it was a praiseworthy possession and made a gallant show on the walls of my study. But I soon found that it had certain peculiarities of behaviour that no amount of attention and care on my part could remedy. Sometimes it

would not go a bit ; sometimes it went too fast ; often the alarum did not run off at all, and oftener it exploded when nobody was expecting it. On the present occasion, as we wanted to be awakened at half-past four, we made a calculation and put the hand at a quarter to seven ; the result of which was that somewhere about midnight the whole dormitory was roused by a most unearthly din, and George and I brought down upon our heads the muttered wrath of a dozen disturbed sleepers.

"Never mind ! What will they say when they see what we bring back with us ?" whispered George to me, when he had satisfied himself that it was not yet morning.

We resolved not to trust to the alarum again, but to take the chance of awakening. And we were lucky, for at five o'clock we were trudging over the dewy meadows, exulting in the sharp, clear, morning air, and the prospect which awaited us at the end of this unwonted walk.

"You shall have two, you know," said George. "Lessing must have one, and I think I will give one to old Leake, and send one home to my small brothers. I expect there will be seven in the nest ; there were seven in the one Beesley found, so, if none get broken, I shall have two to put in my collection."

Disposing of his unhatched chickens thus, George led the way to the spot where he guessed that the nest would be found. We had just struggled through a hedge, and were making for the bushy fringe which marked the river's course, when somebody called out to us and we looked round in sudden alarm, for we remembered that we were trespassing. But running away was useless. It was a gentleman on horseback who had challenged us—the owner of the property, or one of the better class of farmers—a close

shaven, fresh faced, comfortable-looking agriculturist, riding quietly about over his land at that early hour. A few ambles of his cob put him within easy speaking distance.

"I say, my young grass won't be improved by you boys tramping over it."

"We didn't know we were doing any harm, sir," said George.

"Look at that hedge! Do you not call that harm? I call you two a very cool couple of customers. Have you been robbing the mail that you come smashing over my fields in this way?"

Seeing that he was not disposed to be very angry, we took heart and told him all about it—

"I'm sure we are very sorry if we have done any mischief, sir. We were only going to the river side to get a kingfisher's nest, under that willow tree. Would you mind us going through this field just for once?"

"As you have gone so far, it doesn't much matter," said the farmer, with a good-natured growl. "But, if it is that kingfisher's eggs you are after, I fear you have come a day too late for the fair. One of my lads found it out. He is a son of old Eldon the bird-stuffer at Naveford, and last night his father came over, and they harried the nest as clean as could be. These eggs sell for something, I fancy. Never mind; better luck next time," he added, seeing the disappointment on our faces. "There's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it. In the meanwhile, you get out of my grass, youngsters. Down to the gate there, and over the next field you'll see a stile. After that you'll be in the lane."

I thanked him, and we turned away, and George didn't speak a word till we got to the stile, and then he sat down on it and uttered something very like an oath.

I looked up in surprise, and George understood me and said—

“Well, it *is* hard. If we had only taken it yesterday!”

There was nothing to be done but bear the disappointment. We set our dejected faces homewards, and on the way George spoke not a single word, with the exception of a short “yes” and “no” now and then, in answer to some remarks of mine. Nor did I trouble him much with my conversation, for I perceived that he was vexed with himself, as much as with the rival who had forestalled him. He was angry that not only had he lost the eggs, but that he had lost his temper. I don’t think I had ever heard George swear before. I think he resolved that I should never hear him do so again.

When we got back the fellows wanted to know what we had been about, and we could not altogether hide our errand, and then we got chaffed for the ill success of our cunning plot, and not gently remonstrated with by the sleepy heads who had been roused through the night by our alarm arrangements. And George didn’t rage at them, but held his tongue and was evidently trying to bear both the disappointment and the chaff as well as he could.

And all day he was very quiet and subdued, remembering, no doubt, that ugly word that had slipped out of his mouth in the morning, and keeping a guard on the little member which plays such a dangerous part in so many great matters. It was only towards the evening, when playing fives with Marshall and two other fellows, that he forgot himself. Marshall was in a very bad humour that day, and certainly something had happened which was very provoking to him. He had been to have a tooth drawn, and old Mr Bellew, the dentist, instead of operating himself, had allowed his

son Matthew to try his 'prentice hand. Now Matthew Bellew was only sixteen and had left our school but three months before, and when he was there Mr Marshall had been wont to bully him not a little. Matthew had his revenge now, for—the occasion no doubt making him nervous—he succeeded in breaking the patient's tooth, and hurting him very much. So Marshall came home furious, vowing vengeance and raging promiscuously all about him ; and when he and George began to play ball, the consequence that might have been expected ensued, and the well-known sounds of wordy warfare echoed through all the playground. But in the middle of the dispute, one was astonished to find Kennedy restrain himself with an effort, and say very formally—

“I think you were mistaken,” and walk off in peace, actually leaving his adversary the last word.

I am not sure that this was the best end for such a scene. Schoolboy quarrels when spoken out or fought out are done with ; what control does for a temper like George's, is often to exchange passion for sullenness, and by covering the soreness, keep in the bad humour that might otherwise have evaporated in heat or storm. To tie the tongue is something ; it is a far harder task to rule the spirit.

This was not George's last quarrel with Marshall, nor his first. After having been close companions for a time, they seemed to have taken a dislike to each other, and were now always squabbling. If they had been smaller boys, they would probably have fought and had it over long ago ; but this way of settling disputes was not often practised among the elder fellows at Whitminster. We used to box together at nights and knew each other's prowess pretty well. Though Marshall was taller and stronger, he was not so sure of being



able to thrash Kennedy that he could venture to take liberties with him; and George never went further than saying that he would not refuse a challenge if given him.

These two were the Achilles and Agamemnon of our cricket club. Marshall had just been appointed captain of the house eleven, and George was certainly very insubordinate. He contradicted and argued and wanted his own way, and Marshall was by no means conciliatory in his manner, so they came together like fire and gunpowder, and there was a blow up. Their animosity did, indeed, one day go the length of blows upon the field, but the other fellows stopped them. George was wroth because Marshall insisted upon appointing Dunnismore scorer to the eleven and taking him about to the matches. He said that "the lap-dog" was too great a sneak for such an honourable post. In revenge Dunnismore ventured to suggest to Marshall that he should stretch his authority and turn George out of the eleven, but Marshall wouldn't listen to it for a moment.

"He is one of the best players we have, though he is so uncertain," he said.

George's temper might be bad, but his bowling was at times undeniably good, and, in the dearth of big fellows which at that time afflicted Whitminster School, his services could not be dispensed with. Marshall had his faults, but in his official capacity he must be magnanimous. The captain of the eleven could have no enemies.

And George Kennedy? He was beginning to find that he had at least one enemy, harder to fight against than a wilderness of Marshalls.







“Look here!” said George. “I want to tell you something.”—GEORGE’S ENEMIES, page 193.



## CHAPTER XV.

### FAILING.

**O**NE wet Wednesday afternoon, George and I were in his study. He had just finished writing a long letter home, and was now sitting swinging his legs on the edge of the table, and cutting a pen of which the point seemed never to please him, while I was engaged in drawing a monkey on the window-sill.

"Look here," said George. "I want to tell you something."

"Why don't you tell it then?"

"Did you hear what Mr Willoughby said?"

"When? What do you mean? He is always saying something."

"Why, last night, at the confirmation class."

Then I understood that he was going to talk about something serious, and left off drawing the monkey.

"I mean—he said we were always looking out for other people's faults, but we didn't try to find out the ones we were most addicted to. That's quite true. I have been thinking about it."

I scarcely knew what to say when George had enounced this new doctrine in moral philosophy, but I gave him to know, somehow or other, that I agreed with him, and then began to peck with my pencil at the putty in the window. George's awkwardness wore off as he got into the subject, and he went on, speaking quickly—

"I know I don't trouble myself much about my own faults, though I am hard enough on other fellows when they sneak or worry me. I have one fault, at all events, that I ought to get rid of. I am a dreadful fellow for losing my temper, Bob; ain't I?"

"Well—yes," George's friend was obliged to admit, not feeling at all at his ease in this post of confessor.

"That's what I want to talk to you about. I never have really tried to stop it, and it is getting worse. I fly into a rage, and sometimes I am sorry for it afterwards, and sometimes I am not; at all events I never think of it at the time. But I have made up my mind to get out of that way of going on, and I want you to help me. Will you?"

"If I can, George."

"Of course you can. As soon as you see me getting into a wax, just come and give me a poke or a pinch, or do something to remind me that I promised not to. Then I shall remember and keep quiet. Will you promise?"

"But then you'll get angry at me," I objected, thinking of certain previous experiences.

"Oh! no, I shan't."

"All right, then."

I was glad to see that George was trying to get over this failing of his, and I couldn't help promising what he asked;

but at the same time I didn't much like the task he imposed on me, and my misgivings proved to be reasonable.

All that day he was as good-natured as a lamb, and when I saw him playing at the undignified game of hot cockles with some of the small boys, and laughing as loudly and cheerily as if he did not know how to utter an angry word, I began to hope that my duties as his monitor would not be so unpleasant as I feared. But it was only next day that he lost his temper on the cricket ground, and I heard him and Marshall storming away at each other. Then I summoned up resolution to interfere. This I did in the shape of a poke in the ribs, the only effect of which was to make George turn angrily round and exclaim, "shut up!"

The match was over, and the other fellows were moving off by this time, leaving Achilles to rage unheeded, so I found myself able to remind him of his own request.

"You know you asked me——"

"I know I wish you would mind your own business," flamed George, buttoning on his jacket, and lifting his light hair off his face that was glowing like a live coal, partly from heat and partly from anger.

"But you said I was to tell you if you lost your temper."

"Lost my temper!" cried George. "What on earth do you mean, Smith? If any other fool dared to say that to me, I'd thrash him till he couldn't stand."

"Oh, George! How can you? You know you are not in a good humour, and you told me to tell you——"

"Yes; but that was if I got into a wax about nothing. I should like to know who could be in a good humour when he sees the bullying way that fellow Marshall behaves! And these fellows siding with him, because they

are afraid of him. Cads ! Do you mean to say I ought to have been out ? ”

“ Well, you know all the fellows said so, and——”

“ I declare, Smith, you are as great a fool as any of them. I never thought you had so little sense. I wish you would go away and not stand bothering there. I don't want to speak to you if you can't learn to mind your own business and not think you know better than everybody else about everything.”

George turned abruptly round and went to pick up his bat, which was lying a little way off. I turned off the other way, pondering upon certain things—perhaps upon the weakness of human nature, perhaps upon the inconveniences of friendship—and resolving not again lightly to undertake the ungrateful duty of jogging George's conscience. But I hadn't reached the gate of the field when George came bounding after me, and put his arm round my neck.

“ I say, old fellow, I have been talking a lot of nonsense, haven't I ? Don't mind what I said. You were right, and I am very much obliged to you for telling me.”

“ All right, George ! I knew you would get out of it soon.”

“ Yes, but I am a fool for having got into it. I don't know how it is. I make up my mind I won't get into a rage again, and at the time it seems as if I should never do it, but then something happens to worry me, and off I go, and there's no use talking to me. I am trying to cool down just now and I can't. I wish I hadn't such a beastly temper. But I have made up my mind to get over it, and I *shall*,” and with that George swung his bat round ferociously, and smashed down nearly a whole bed of nettles.

The next time George got into a rage I was very much more disposed to sympathise with him. This time the object of his wrath was Dunnismore. George had never liked this smooth-faced young gentleman, and when there were not found wanting kind friends to tell him how Dunnismore had said he ought to be turned out of the eleven, seeing that he quarrelled so much and was so uncertain in his play—why, you may imagine that the love of the one for the other was not increased. To tell the truth, George began to hate Dunnismore. Perhaps he disguised this hatred from himself by allowing it to take the form of contempt. He felt that it would be beneath him to assail such a muff, and simply left Dunnismore alone, till one unlucky day when the latter's cleverness for once got him into a scrape.

There was a little boy in the house called Barton, who had come to school for the first time that Easter, and had been recommended to George's august protection. George hadn't done much for him except treating him with the good-natured patronage which he generally bestowed on small boys, but one day he found the little chap crying in the lavatories, and stopped to ask what was the matter. Then Charley Barton told his tale of woe, how he had had five shillings sent him by his aunt, and how Dunnismore had half persuaded and half forced him to bet upon some horse, and how the horse had not won, according to Dunnismore's account, and how the five shillings had been handed over most unwillingly; hence these tears. George scarcely waited to hear the end of the story, or to inquire into its truth. He at once bounced out into the playground, and descended like a wolf upon that lamb Dunnismore, who expostulated, explained, exclaimed, and then began to howl



bitterly when he found himself getting a most satisfactory thrashing.

This chastisement was going on when a window above opened suddenly, and Mrs Pearson's voice was heard all over the playground—

"Kennedy! Kennedy! How dare you touch that little boy? you great, coarse, rough, cruel bully! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, sir. Go into the house this moment, and be sure I will ask Mr Willoughby to punish you severely. Don't cry, my dear, I'll take care he never touches you again. Come to tea with me this evening, and you shall learn your lessons in my room."

George let go his prey and stalked slowly off to the schoolroom, and all the fellows came crowding in to learn what had happened.

"I was licking a fellow who deserved to be licked," was all George would say. Mrs Pearson's sudden and unexpected attack had borne him down for the moment as it were. But his wrath and his courage revived when Marshall came plunging into the room, bellowing out—

"I say, I won't stand you bullying Dunnismore! What right have you to thrash him?"

"What right has he to try to cheat a little fellow?"

"Who says he was cheating?"

"I say so. He got young Barton to make a bet with him and then took his money from him. It's as bad as stealing every bit."

"What bosh! If young Barton chooses to bet, it's his own look out. Anyhow, it isn't any business of yours. Nobody but prefects have any right to lick fellows. It's regular, downright bullying, that's what I call it."

"I don't care a button what you call it," cried George, at

the pitch of his voice. "A nice kind of prefect you are, standing up for sneaks and cheats! Who is it that set a-going all this confounded betting and rubbish? That's at the bottom of this money being stolen."

"That's a lie, Kennedy. I should think you are as likely to have stolen the money as any one."

"So are you, Marshall!"

"Will you dare to say that again?" roared Marshall.

"Yes I will!" and George confronted him with set lips and flaming eyes, and in another moment a blow would have been struck on one side or the other, if an interruption had not taken place.

"Kennedy! Mr Willoughby wants Kennedy to come to him at once."

A summons of this kind was not to be neglected, and George was obliged to content himself with casting a parting glance of defiance at Marshall before he made his way out of the crowd. Then everybody began asking what was the meaning of it all, for nobody exactly knew, not even those boys who had seen George's sudden attack upon Dunnismore. I lifted up my voice and told the story in no mild terms. I had seen the whole affair from the beginning and was boiling with indignant sympathy for George.

"I didn't mean to cheat the little fool," protested Dunnismore. "If he chooses to make a bet, that's his own look out."

"Stuff! What does he know about betting. You are a regular cad, Dunnismore."

"That he is," cried Phillips. "He ought to be made to go to Willoughby and tell the whole story. It isn't fair that Kennedy should get into a scrape through him."

"That's a good idea!" cried Marshall. "Is it his fault

that Mrs Pearson saw Kennedy licking him and told about it?"

"It is his fault that Kennedy has got into a scrape," I maintained warmly.

"Here he is!" cried some fellow, and George came stalking back into the room with a peculiarly dignified and deliberate air.

"Have you seen him? What did you get?"

"Caned," said George, walking on and trying to appear cool and indifferent.

"No! How many did you have? What did he say? Did he think you were bullying?"

George did not answer these inquiries at once, but having made his way to the middle of the room he condescended to gratify public curiosity.

"He said he didn't suppose I would be a bully, but unless I could give some explanation, he must lick me. He was quite right."

"And didn't you tell him what Dunnismore had been doing?"

"Not I," said George, in a loud, excited voice. "I wouldn't sneak. I hate it. I wouldn't get another fellow into a scrape."

"Well, you got me into a scrape once," whined Dunnismore.

"Yes, but I couldn't help it. And you deserved to catch it that time. I shouldn't mind having a licking if I knew I deserved it. I hope I am not such a baby."

George was now trying to manage a calm, withering tone of scorn, but it was a failure. His sarcasm seemed so ferocious that Dunnismore's alarm returned, and he shrank back under Marshall's wing.

"Oh, don't be afraid," said George, loftily. "I am not going to touch you. I am sorry I ever tried to thrash a coward."

"You had better not touch him again," exclaimed Marshall. "I'll see to that."

"Will you?" cried George, turning hotly upon him. He had thought it his duty to restrain his wrath towards Dunnismore, seeing that the latter was smaller and had injured him. But he had done this with an effort, and was now quite relieved to find a chance of venting his indignation upon a bigger fellow. So, for a minute these two were again as near the brink of war as ever were France and Prussia. Marshall, however, drew back. He began to see that he was on the side of a bad, or at least an unpopular cause.

"Now don't be an ass," he said, by way of conciliation. "I don't want to make a row about it; but I think you had much better not have interfered in this affair, and then you wouldn't have got into a scrape. You have nobody to blame but yourself."

"Did I blame anybody?"

"It's all Dunnismore's fault. I vote we give him a kicking," cried I, and there were murmurs of assent; whereupon Dunnismore began to look blank.

"Leave him alone," cried Marshall. "He has had a licking, and he says he'll give back young Barton's money."

"Yes; but George has had a caning."

"Well, that wasn't his fault. How could he help Mrs Pearson's seeing and telling?"

"But he oughtn't to have let Kennedy be caned for bullying him."

"I vote we send him to Coventry, anyhow," cried Abbing; and this proposal met with general approval.

"Yes! yes! Send him to Coventry!" was the cry, and Marshall no longer said anything in favour of Dunnismore, who, seeing the turn things were taking, made haste to escape from the room, which he did not do without receiving several spoken and acted expressions of disapproval.

And now George was in his glory. He had avenged the cause of the oppressed; he had been punished unjustly; he had showed what he considered great magnanimity under the circumstances; and Marshall had quailed before his righteous indignation. No wonder that he thought himself a very fine fellow, and that we thought so too.

"Oh be quiet!" he had said crossly, when I ventured to express so much; but it was evident that he was not ashamed of himself.

Under the influence of his own self-approval and the applause of the public, he passed from a wrathful into a singularly gracious and condescending mood. He was elaborately polite to Marshall, and if he could have found an opportunity, I dare say he might even have stooped to pardon Dunnismore.

But Dunnismore kept out of the way all the rest of the day. In the evening he went to tea with Mrs Pearson, and we didn't see him till supper time, when we were minded to give our virtue the gratification of despising this offender. When he entered the room, we regarded him with looks of lofty contempt, which did not, however, prevent us from noticing that he carried in his hand a singularly large pot of jam. This was an unexpected feature in the scene that we proposed to enact, and now our indignation began to waver. No one spoke to Dunnismore as he took his seat, but no one frowned at him, and many eyes were fixed on the jam pot. Wonderfully tempting it looked as he put

two or three rich, thick, crimson spoonfuls on his plate. It was more than flesh could bear. Abbing, sitting opposite him—Abbing, who had been the first to propose that he should be sent to Coventry—Abbing the virtuous, the stern moralist, was the first to speak :

“Is that damson you have there?” he asked, meekly.

“Yes. Have some?” replied Dunnismore, shoving the jar over the table towards him.

“I say, Dunnismore, give us a taste ; there’s a good fellow,” cried one and another, and plates were pushed in from all quarters.

Oh, frail human nature ! Before such a spell as a pot of jam the virtuous indignation of our community became powerless. George and I, and some other fellows, indeed, assumed a righteous severity, and would have none of his dainties ; but when once a beginning was made, the boys who had been kicking and denouncing Dunnismore came flocking round him with open and friendly mouths.

So Dunnismore’s ostracism came to an end. The pot of jam also came to an end ; and if he could have any doubt on the matter, he was able to see plainly that the fellows sympathised with George, and thought he had behaved badly. Even Marshall did not show him so much of his countenance as before. For this, as well as the thrashing, he had to thank George, and Dunnismore was a spiteful little fellow, as we shall see presently.





## CHAPTER XVI.

### LOVE, WAR, AND POETRY.

**I**T is a hot, still, summer afternoon. Not a breath of wind moves the swelling foliage of the trees or the thick meadow grass rich with buttercups and daisies. The tulips hang their gorgeous heads, and the convolvuluses open their eyes wide and stare stupidly at the sun. In the sky above not a single frolicsome little cloud disturbs the serenity of the blue vault, and beneath, the very lambs are at rest in the hollows ; while under the beech trees the cattle lie lazily and dream of bovine bliss, or still more lazily rouse themselves for a whisk of the tail or a mouthful from the stream. The birds are quiet in their nests, with only an occasional cheep or twitter, as if to say to visitors, "not at home." Men and women, too, are staying within door, or lounging along the shady sides of streets. Scarcely a wheel disturbs the dust of the roads. The perch cannot summon up resolution enough to do more than nibble, and the angler falls asleep with his pipe in his mouth. Cats and dogs lie on opposite door steps, placidly regarding each other with languid growl or miaou.

Everybody and everything in the world of nature is taking it easy in this weather except schoolboys, for it is a half-holiday.

We are in our cricket field. The match between our house and Dalton's is going on, and we are winning and triumphing. George is in, and is playing splendidly to-day. Marshall, who has just been caught out after making forty-three to his own bat, is reposing by the tent, and, forgetful of quarrels and jealousies, applauds with genuine enthusiasm every slashing hit with which his rival sends up the score nearer and nearer to the number required to win by an innings and three wickets. Our opponents are bowling and fielding like brave men who know not what it is to be beaten, but despair is written on their sweltering and sunburnt countenances. The lookers on of both houses lie on the grass in cricketing costume or with unbuttoned waistcoats, and cheer and criticise. A few indefatigable cubs, heedless of the heat, are emulating the prowess of their superiors at the other end of the field. In the most shady corner are placed some half dozen benches whereon sit to be admired of all boys, a select few of the gentler sex, mothers and sisters of our schoolfellows—Sargent's and Carrison's and Wilkinson's "people," with perhaps a fair stranger or two, to one or other of whom fortunate or bold young men are making themselves agreeable. And among these damsels who grace our sports is Miss Alice Grey.

Who is Miss Alice Grey? You can never have lived at Whitminster or you would not think of asking such a question. Miss Alice Grey is the daughter of Mr Henry Grey, Surgeon and General Practitioner, a man as well known in the town as the Minster Tower itself. Moreover, Miss Alice Grey may perhaps be called the belle of our



school. At all events she is at this moment the mistress of Phillips's susceptible heart.

Then why does that admirer of the dames hold aloof, and walk timidly round the bevy of ladies, and hesitate to approach the presence of his *Dulcinea*? This is an opportunity for which he has long sighed; and indeed he despises himself for his bashfulness. But, alas! Miss Alice Grey is held in conversation by Another, and that other is proclaimed by his moustaches and his bearing, as well as by the voice of rumour, to be "an officer," and we know in what dread a real military rival is held by love-sick school-boys. So Phillips sighs at a distance, until with joy he sees the officer take his leave, when he emboldens himself and advances towards Miss Grey.

Everybody was chaffing Jemima Anne that hot afternoon, because he appeared on the field in his overcoat. Malicious tongues whispered that he was tormented by misgivings that his jacket was too short and his legs too long, and wore this inconvenient garment to hide these defects from Miss Alice Grey. Phillips himself said he was sure that it would rain before the day was over. And certainly he was right, for just when he found the coast left clear for him to display his graces of garb and genius, and just as George Kennedy, after a long and victorious career, was bowled out by Paddy Williamson, who was playing for Dalton's, it suddenly began to rain. The thunder cloud which more weather-wise observers than the present writer had seen approaching out of the sultry haze to the south, had just now reached our cricket field. First came a few heavy drops making people look up incredulously. Then more and heavier drops, which caused the ladies to remember with horror and alarm that they had brought

with them neither cloaks nor umbrellas, too rashly trusting to the politeness of such a bright, warm day. In a minute more the summer storm had thrown off all disguise and opened its batteries full upon the defenceless crowd of ladies and cricketers, and the pelting shower was driving everybody to take refuge under the tent or the trees.

Everybody, that is, except the gallant young men who of course sped off to the schoolhouse to fetch all available umbrellas for the service of the ladies. And of course Phillips was foremost among these. Here was a chance for him to win favour in *her* eyes. That dastard of an officer was lying beneath a hedgerow with his coat collar turned up over his ears; but he would show her that true love did not fear a wetting. So he actually threw off his heavy overcoat and ran on through the rain as he had never run for a prize, and was the first to reach the house, where, without delay or ceremony of borrowing, he selected the largest umbrella that met his eye, and rushed back, dripping outwardly, but inwardly glowing with delight to think he was the first to offer this testimony of devotedness to the object of his affections.

But unfortunately it was Balbus's umbrella which he had brought, and this, an ancient hereditary instrument, though of respectable and even formidable appearance, was subject to certain infirmities which went far towards impairing its usefulness. In the first place it would scarcely ever open; and then having by rare chance been coaxed into spreading its swelling alpaca to the breeze, it was wont neither by force or persuasion to be induced to shut. On the present occasion Phillips pushed at the spring and grew red in the face, in vain. The storm came pitilessly down; the treacherous umbrella would not go up. The eager youth

gasped out apologies ; the young lady smiled faintly ; the wretched machine was not to be manipulated. And then,—horror upon horror !—in dashed Dunnismore with a tractable umbrella and a civil speech, and, forgetting in her haste to thank Phillips, Miss Alice Grey put herself under the Lapdog's protection and hurried away home.

There was Phillips left alone, jealous, despondent, wet. Was ever lover or poet so hardly used ? And presently Dunnismore came back to exult over his disappointment.

"I say, Jemima," he began, putting his tongue into his cheek in a way that would have shocked Mrs Pearson ; "I say, Alice Grey wouldn't have you to see her home after all. Sell, wasn't it ? Eh ?"

"I hope you don't flatter yourself that she cared to have you with her, you sneaking lapdog."

"She was very glad to get rid of you, long-legged donkey that you are."

"Shut up, Dunnismore," said Phillips, in tones where wrath strove with dignity. If Dunnismore hadn't been so small he would have fallen on him with violent hands ; but poets are ever chivalrous.

"Shut up yourself. I say, I told her that your name was Joe—long-legged Joe."

"You wretched little cad !" cried Phillips, giving way altogether to wrath. "How dare you ? Never mind, I shall tell her something about you. She doesn't know that you cheat small boys out of their money, or she wouldn't have anything to say to you."

"You may tell any lies you like about me," said Dunnismore, nettled in his turn. "I can tell something as bad about you."

"What ?"

"Oh! you know very well. You are a nice fellow to pretend to be so honourable. I could get you expelled any day."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Phillips, turning red; but Dunnismore had run off and left him to his somewhat sorrowful reflections.

Phillips shivered; he had just had a wetting and a fright. He knew what Dunnismore alluded to. That business of the eggs had never come to light, but Mrs Pearson had been speaking to him about it only a few days before, and every now and then he was troubled by fears lest he should be found out. Would Alice Grey ever speak to him again if he were punished as a petty thief? Could he ever glory in his fame as a poet if he were expelled from school for stealing? That mean little fellow, Dunnismore, undoubtedly had a hold on him; yet, in spite of his uneasiness, Phillips could not help feeling a certain amount of satisfaction in the romantic nature of the situation. There was a mystery in his life! He was haunted by a skeleton! At any moment the storm might burst over his head! This was as it should be in the case of a poet.

After the vexations he had experienced, Phillips felt himself in the mood to write a poem, and was walking up and down after tea in the meadow behind the schoolhouse and communing with his muse, when he received a message to the effect that Marshall wished to speak to him at once.

Poets have from times immemorial been too much dependent on the favour of mere worldly potentates; Phillips did not feel himself able to disobey this summons. So he descended from Olympus, and submissively repaired to the great man's study, wondering what could be the matter, and hoping with all his heart that the story about

the eggs was not coming out. He was soon reassured on that head.

"I say, Jemima," began Marshall, entering upon his business without delay, "you can write poetry, and all that sort of thing, can't you?"

"Yes," said Phillips, doubtfully, for he was astonished at the abruptness and unexpectedness of the question, and did not feel quite sure whether this talent of which he was so proud would be likely to gain him favour in Marshall's eyes.

"That's all right. Now look here, Jemima. I want to write a poem, and you must do it for me."

"A poem," stammered Phillips, still more astonished.

"Yes—some verses. Only a few, you know. You can knock them off in no time."

"But what's it to be about?"

"Oh! about a girl. I am going to write her a little letter in poetry, don't you see? Come on, Jemima; be a good fellow and help me, and I'll give you sixpence—there now!"

This was tempting. Phillips' pocket money was stopped just then to pay for a sheet which he had burned while reading in bed with a candle, and the sound of the promised sixpence was grateful in his ears; and, still further to tell the truth, he was somewhat flattered by being applied to for such a service. Moreover, he was in the vein for a little sentiment; so he hummed and hawed, and smiled, and ran his fingers through his hair, and said:

"Perhaps—I dare say—I think I have got something that will do;" and with that he drew from his pocket a rough copy of a few lines which had suggested themselves to him that evening.

"That's the thing! Read 'em out! Fire away!"

"Of course they are not polished up," said Phillips, modestly; "but I shall improve them if you like the style. The metre is very uncommon."

"All right! Let's hear it."

" 'Lovely love,  
Darling dove,  
Fly to me;  
I sigh for thee! ' "

So read Phillips, and then looked interrogatively into his patron's face.

"H'm," said Marshall. "Sounds rather queer, doesn't it? The lines don't seem quite long enough."

"They get longer in every verse. It's a new idea," said Phillips. "Here's the next verse"—

" 'Day after day  
Do I pine away,  
And my spirit it dies,  
Withered up by thine eyes.' "

"Oh! I say, that's coming it rather strong," interrupted Marshall. "You must draw it a little milder, *Jemima*. She'll think I'm humbugging her, you know."

"This is a nicer metre," and Phillips went on—

" 'You walk in beauty like the night,  
For me you are too sweet and bright;  
You glitter like unto the starry skies,  
And you do not care for my groans and sighs.' "

"Yes, I dare say it's very pretty; but it's not the sort of thing I want. Here, do me a new one altogether, and I'll tell you what I want to say;" and Marshall produced

paper, pens, and ink, and placed his one sound chair at the ricketty table where he did his work ; all with the air of a person who was accustomed to have his orders attended to.

"Sit down now and go ahead."

"Well, what am I to say?"

"Say—oh!—say—say that she's very fine looking, and describe her hair and eyes a bit, and all that sort of thing. Then say I am very fond of her, and I'm afraid she cares for some other fellow."

"But I don't know what to say about her hair and eyes. What colour are they?"

"What colour are they? Let me see. They are blue—yes, they are blue—at least her eyes are. Her hair is a sort of light brown, and she has very fine red cheeks. You can make something out of that, I should think. Now, remember, I don't want it quite so sentimental. Put a little fun into it, can't you?"

Phillips reflected a minute or two. Then he was seized by an idea, and seized a pen,

"I think I can manage it," he said. "What do you say to a sonnet with the same rhyme at the end of every line?"

"I dare say  
you alone and  
half-an-hour, &  
the sixpence &  
I'll take you  
match."

With this p  
ously to work  
lines were sub

"Oh  
No

Oh beautiful, curly, golden hair !  
That strikes me so with its dazzling glare !  
Oh eyes that shine through the liquid air,  
And drive my heart to deep despair !  
Oh coral lips beyond compare !  
Oh rosy cheeks and beauty rare !  
Oh splendid dresses that she doth wear !  
Oh ivory teeth that men ensnare !  
Oh smiles that drive away all care !  
Listen to me and hear me swear,  
You have broken my heart beyond repair,  
And made me wretched, I do declare !  
And I sigh, and cry, and do not dare  
To come near thee, but I cannot bear  
My eyes away from thee to tear,  
Because thou art so fearfully fair !”

“Will that do?” said Phillips, looking hard at his patron’s face for an expression of approval.

“Well, yes, I think they will,” said Marshall, reading the lines over with a critical air.

Phillips was glad to hear this for the sake of his sixpence. All the same, he was thinking of keeping his lines for Alice Grey, if Marshall didn’t care for them. It was her he had been thinking of all the time.

“I like this better. Yes, this is the sort of thing. It will do very well. Only I should like to put her name in somewhere.”

“Oh ! that can easily be done. What is her name ?”

“Never you mind, Jemima. Well, I don’t know why I shouldn’t tell you ; but, look here, you had better not let me catch you telling any one else. Will you promise ?”

“Very well, Marshall.”

“Well, it is Alice Grey.”

Fancy Phillips’ feelings ! Marshall did not observe the



effect this disclosure had produced, for he was engaged in reading over the lines again.

"I think we can put her name in just at the end; but I don't know that it matters. All right, Jemima, you shall have your sixpence. Now you can cut."

There was no help for it. Phillips dared not openly oppose the Agamemnon who was carrying away from him his Briseis; but all the deeper was he disquieted inwardly. At least, he vowed to himself he would never be caught writing verses again for another. Had he nourished the divine gift of verse only to use it unwittingly in the service of a powerful rival? Was the prize to be conquered before his eyes, and by weapons that he himself had forged? Was it for this that he had studied Alice Grey's fair features so long and so lovingly? Was it for this that he had used so much hair oil? Was it for this that he had abjured the tart shop, saving up his pocket-money to buy those gorgeous gilt studs which might shine brilliantly in her eyes? Was it for this that he had taken to fishing, though he never could exercise skill or patience enough to catch a minnow, only because Grey was wont to go fishing on the river on half-holidays, and his sisters often accompanied him? Was this to be the end of all his expressive glances, and his verses, and enchanting dreams? Was he to be a mere fellow with a red face and coarse manners, whose poetry might well be despised as the blarney of a schoolboy?

His emotions  
which were

For every stroke on my spirit knells,  
And adds to my misery.

“My soul it feeleth a deep desire,  
That hath oppressed it long ;  
It is consumed by an inward fire,  
And fain would burst in song.

“Wither’d and bent I creep and cough,  
By the rolling river’s shore ;  
A cruel foe has borne her off,  
And will bring her back no more.

“’Twas here she rambled oft before  
She left me all alone ;  
She used, in happy days of yore,  
To sit on yonder stone.

“’Twas all—’twas all a gay bright Dream !  
That there would be no waking  
My foolish trustful heart did deem ;  
And now I feel it breaking.”

No doubt Phillips greatly relieved his sorrows by pouring out these verses, but, unfortunately, he wrote them at preparation time, when he ought to have been doing his Xenophon, and next day was turned and had an imposition for his idleness. Also he caught a cold in his head from the wetting he had suffered. Such are the peculiar pains of schoolboy love.

If Phillips’ vanity had not been so closely concerned in the matter, he ought to have been satisfied to know that Marshall did himself but little service with these borrowed weapons. Two or three days afterwards, he heard some boys laughing over a great joke.

“I never heard of him trying his hand at poetry before,”

Grey was saying. "But it was his writing; I am quite sure of it; and I shall never let him hear the end of the joke. You never saw such rubbish. My sister nearly died of laughing when she got it; and last night she read it out at the Wilkinson's tea fight, and everybody roared. I did not think Marshall would have made a fool of himself, anyhow.

Phillips durst not listen to another word. His cheeks had been growing redder and redder, and now he slunk off, and made haste to hide his shame and vexation in solitude. What did he care that it was Marshall whom Alice Grey and her friends would think a fool; it was his own verses, his sweet, sentimental, sounding lines that had made them "roar." And what would Marshall say when he heard of the effect produced by his ambitious missive? Would he not suppose that he had been made fun of? Phillips trembled to think that the reward of his poetical labours might be more kicks than sixpences.

Nor was he far wrong in his forebodings, for that very evening, while he was playing cricket, Marshall appeared, hot, angry, in a hurry, and, roughly seizing Jemima, without ceremony began to drag him away from the position where he was executing the duties of longstop.

"Don't Marshall," remonstrated Phillips as boldly as he could. "I can't come just now."

"But you must come just now," bellowed Marshall. "I want to say a word or two to you, my friend. I hear you have been trying to make a fool of me."

"Let me go! I don't know what you mean," cried Phillips, struggling to get free.

But Marshall kept on dragging him to some more secluded spot, where he purposed that their interview should take

place ; and Phillips' struggles would have been in vain, if one or two of the other players had not run up, among them George Kennedy, bat in hand and wrath on brow.

"What are you doing with Phillips? Leave him alone!"

"'Tisn't any business of yours."

"It is. He is playing in our game."

"Well, your game can wait till he comes back. I'm going to speak to him," replied Marshall ; and though this speech reads very pacific, it will be understood that the tone and gestures of the speaker left no doubt as to the manner in which he was going to speak.

"What has he done to you?" asked somebody.

"Done! Oh, he knows very well what he has done, and I'm going to show him what I shall do to him."

"It's all a mistake, Marshall," declared Phillips, again struggling to get away.

"Is it, indeed? I'll mistake you, and no mistake," replied Marshall, in his loudest voice.

"Leave Phillips alone, Marshall. You shan't take him away from our game, unless he wishes to go. I won't have it."

The speaker was Kennedy, and Marshall turned his wrath upon him.

"You! How cocky you are! Who gave you a right to be always interfering with me?"

"Who gave you a right to be always bullying and bragging, as if the whole school belonged to you?"

"Do you dare to call me a bully?"

"I needn't trouble myself to call you one," said George, with a scornful laugh. "Every fellow in the school knows that you are one, and a cad into the bargain."

Marshall's rage came to a head. His face grew al-

pale, and letting go Phillips, he turned to George and said with forced calmness—

“Kennedy, you are always cheeking me and trying to drive me wild. I suppose you want to fight. Is that it?”

“I don’t know,” said George, with a cool air of indifference, which was intended to be provoking to Marshall, and succeeded.

“Confound you! Will you fight me, or are you afraid?”

“I’m not afraid.”

“Very well. By Jove, I’ll teach you not to meddle with me for a long time. Are you ready?”

“I can’t fight you just now,” replied George coolly, as he looked at his watch. “I have to go to Willoughby at seven. Won’t to-morrow do?”

“Ah! I know. To be preached at,” sneered Marshall.

George was making a great effort to restrain his own passion. But he did restrain it, biting his lip and clenching his fist.

“To-morrow, after dinner; will that suit you?”

“It will suit me,” said Marshall, shamed out of his turbulent rage to some extent by the quiet way in which his adversary received the challenge.

There was great excitement in the schoolhouse when it was known that at length the antipathy of these two was to be settled by a regular fight. Public opinion was of course divided. Most of the fellows hoped George would win; but perhaps few expected him to do so. As for me, I had no doubt about it; and my enthusiasm was so great that I thought of challenging somebody on my own account. Indeed, I dreamt during the night that George having somehow disappeared in that unexplained fashion so common in dreams, I had taken his place and with my own hand had

encountered and overthrown the giant Marshall, a thing much easier to do in a dream than otherwise.

Next morning I thought of nothing and talked of nothing but the approaching fight. What, then, was my astonishment when, just before school, I heard that it was not to come off. I ran to look for George.

"Is it true? Is he not going to fight you?"

"I am not going to fight him," said George drily. "I don't see any reason why we should fight. He won't meddle with Phillips now."

"But after all he said to you yesterday?"

"He didn't say any more to me than I said to him. He is an ill-tempered fellow; but so are other fellows, and I have told him that I don't want to quarrel with him if I can help it."

"And what did he say?"

"Say? Oh, all sorts of things; but I could see very well he wasn't sorry to get out of it."

"But, George, what will the fellows think?" urged I, jealous for his honour.

"Think? Let them think what they please. Do you think I care what they think?" cried George, in a tone which showed plainly that he did care. Then, as if ashamed of trying to deceive me and himself, he looked me hard in the face, and said with a laugh that was half a groan—

"Don't bother me, Bob. You know I am too fond of that sort of thing—and I am trying to get over it—and it is uncommonly hard—and—and—you needn't make it harder."





## CHAPTER XVII.

### SUSPICIONS.

“**W**ELL, I can't guess what can have come over George Kennedy. To think of him funkng a fight!”

So spoke Marshall the same morning, as he walked down to school with two or three other fellows.

“Not a bit of him. He's not afraid; not even of you, Marshall,” said Lessing. “It's all Willoughby's doing. Edwyn Phillip has been persuading him that fighting is wrong or foolish.”

“Edwyn Phillip is foolish.”

“I'm not so sure about that. Perhaps, Marshall, you like having swollen lips and black eyes; but for my part I don't. A fellow looks much less like a fool without them. But tastes differ; and far be it from me to interfere with any gentleman's amusements.”

“Hang that Willoughby! I didn't think he could make Kennedy into a muff.”

“And a sneak too, Cane,” said Dunnismore. “I believe it could have been nobody else who told about you smoking the other day.”

"The deuce!" cried Marshall. "If I thought he did anything of the sort, I'd fight him whether he would or no, and give him a good thrashing into the bargain. The low, sneaking blackguard!"

"Don't excite yourself, Marshall," said Lessing, patting him on the back. "George Kennedy would no more sneak on you than the Prince of Wales would eat a tough old elephant for supper without onion stuffing and mint sauce."

"H'm," sneered Dunnismore. "Of course! I don't like these fellows who try to make up to the masters. They will do anything low if they get a chance."

"Dear me! Don't you like fellows who try to be favourites? How funny!" said Lessing; and just then the members of this party were aware of hasty footsteps behind them, and turning round saw two of the day boys, Grey and Sarjent, running down the hill as fast as they could.

"No hurry!" cried Marshall. "I saw Paddy Williamson at the window as we passed his lodgings, and you know he always starts at ten minutes to nine, as regular as the railway."

"I know," panted Sarjent; "but look here, you fellows, I want to speak to you."

"Speak! We are bound to hear."

"No, Lessing, it isn't any humbug. I want to tell you that I believe there is some fellow who steals books."

"Books!" cried Tom Cane, looking at his companions.

"Yes. I had a new verse book yesterday, and I put it in my desk and forgot to take it home. I remembered after tea, and ran down to the school on the chance of finding it open. Old Sally was sweeping out the big school-room, so I went to my desk, and the book was gone."

"Yes, and yesterday I missed a Smith's Classical Diction-



ary in about the same way," said Grey. "At all events, it isn't to be found anywhere."

"But are you sure any one took it?"

"I am sure some fellow must have walked off with it," cried Grey. "A Smith's Classical Dictionary hasn't got legs, has it?"

"Perhaps some fellow borrowed it, and forgot to put it back," said Dunnismore.

"I don't believe it. Mind you, these aren't the only books that have been missed. My small brother says that two or three fellows in his form declare they have lost books."

"These small boys are always losing books. No offence to you, Dunnismore."

"Oh no! You had better not call me a small boy," laughed Dunnismore. "But if anybody has bagged these books, it must be a small boy. Some of these cubs are always loafing about in the schoolroom. Or Sally."

"I don't believe it," said Sarjent; "and I'll tell you why. Of course it wasn't Sally. Sally has swept out the school any time this twenty years, and besides she is too stupid to steal anything; and look here, if a cub wanted to bag anything, he would have taken a book that might be of use to him, or one that looked as if it would sell for a lot of money. What could he do with a verse-book? or how was he to know that it cost such a lot of money?"

"You speak like a book yourself, Sarjent, and some fellow will be stealing you if you don't look out," said Lessing. "I don't think it could have been a cub. You see a fellow never would be so mad as to use any of these books himself. He must have bagged them to sell to some fellow in the town, which is a stroke of true genius quite above a cub, however objectionable in a moral point of view."

"Surely no fellow in the upper school would do such a thing."

"I don't know, Grey," said Sarjent. "There are some fellows who would do almost anything. Abbing, for instance."

"Anyhow, I am determined to find him out; and, by Jove, I shouldn't like to be in his skin when I do."

Marshall and Tom Cane had been whispering together, and now the former said—

"I suppose we had better tell you it at once. I believe we know something about this;" and then he went on to recount what had been happening at Mrs Pearson's house,

"My eye!" cried Sarjent. "What on earth tempted you to keep this such a secret? The masters ought to have been told, and all the fellows should know that there is a thief among them."

"We thought we could find out ourselves, and we didn't want to make any more row about it than could be helped."

"Didn't you? I can tell you I should make row enough if anybody stole a sovereign from me; and if I don't get back my Dictionary by this afternoon, I'll go and tell Dalton, and there will be a row and no mistake. I never knew such a thing!"

"That's what we ought to have done at the beginning," said Lessing. "I always voted for telling Willoughby; but Cane here thought he was wonderfully clever, and promised to find out the fellow in no time."

"Well, I did my best, and I am not sure that I can't lay my finger on him yet. I have an idea!"

"What is it?"

"I won't tell you just yet. What do you say to searching all the fellows' desks?"

"It mightn't be a bad plan," said Sarjent. "But there is not much chance of the fellow putting it in his desk."

"Shall we tell all the fellows?"

"Better not," said Dunnismore. "Perhaps we can catch him at it."

"There's something in that, though I must say I don't like making a mystery of things. At all events, I shall say nothing about it till this afternoon. I will go and take a look about the schoolroom now, and see if I can find my verse-book," said Sarjent.

By this time, it will be understood, the speakers had arrived in the play-ground. Most of them went into the school, but Marshall and Dunnismore remained outside, and lounged against the railings of the Minster Green.

"I can't understand this," declared Marshall. "I never was so puzzled. I haven't the slightest idea who could have done it. Tom Cane has suspected a dozen fellows, but each time it turned out to be all moonshine. You suspected the servants, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did once, but I don't now," said Dunnismore; and there was something in his tone which led Marshall to ask—

"Why? Do you suspect any of the fellows now?"

"Not exactly; but I think there's a fellow who—I don't like to say his name, Marshall, because it's somebody that you and I don't care much for."

"Never mind. Who is it?"

"You must know. You charged him with it the other night, and he looked very queer."

"Who? You don't mean Kennedy?"

"He didn't seem to like what you said. But, mind you, I don't say he did it. I have no proof."

"Oh, it's all nonsense! I didn't mean what I said. Why, man, I don't like Kennedy, but I don't suppose he would prig things. No; I'd as soon accuse almost any fellow; I'd as soon think you stole the money."

"Me!"

"Yes. Are you offended?"

"Don't say that, Marshall," said Dunnismore, gravely. "I don't like being called a thief, even in fun."

"Didn't know you were so sensitive, Dunny," said Marshall, sitting down on a great stone, and taking the other on his knee. "Never mind, I won't chaff him again, the little dear. Now, tell me what makes you think Kennedy did it. He certainly is a stuck-up, ill-tempered fool."

"Marshall, don't you know that Kennedy is locked into the schoolroom every day from twelve to one. Haven't you heard the fellows saying that he asked Willoughby to keep him in for something or other? Did you ever hear of a fellow getting himself punished, unless for some reason? If he is left in the school by himself, he will be able to go to all the fellows' desks, and do what he likes."

"I say! There is something in that. I wonder I never thought of it before. I asked him if it was true that he had got himself kept in, and he turned round at me in his crusty way and told me to mind my own business. Well, he's the last fellow I should have thought of to do such a thing. Fellows of that sort, though, are always turning out to be quite different from what you would have thought. Dunnismore, we must look after him, but don't say anything to any body just yet."

Now, it was quite true that George was being kept in every day by his own desire; and Marshall was not the only fellow who did not know what to make of the story

that was current about it. I had questioned him, but like other people found him rather uncommunicative on the subject. Afterwards I came to know all about it.

For some time, as has been already said, George had been conducting himself in school with great propriety. He had been learning his lessons, and was attentive in school, and didn't play tricks, and in consequence didn't get into any scrapes. But as the cricket season went on, he began to be less blameless. The temptation was great; it was dull work getting up Euclid and Greek grammar, when one could go out and make a tremendous score, or win the applause of all beholders by such dexterous and deadly bowling as made Kennedy's services so valuable to the eleven. There were matches, and diligent practisings therefor, and lying in shady spots at the hot noonday, and runs into the country before breakfast, and bathing parties in the afternoon. In the summer months the hours of preparation of lessons were not rigidly enforced, and the upper school boys were allowed to do more as they pleased with their time. This, however, was not taken as an excuse for idleness, for we were not among these apolaustic seminaries of cricket and football, to which the ancient name of *ludus* might be so appropriately applied. This was Mr Williamson's view of the matter, at all events; and all the summer he was in a state of wrath and grief about us who inclined towards a contrary doctrine as to the employments suited for the season. And George was no worse than other people, if he was often scolded and threatened with dreadful impositions which seemed all the more dreadful in such fine weather.

"I won't have it, Kennedy," cried Mr Williamson, one morning. "If this is the first, it is the hundred and fifty-

fifth time you have come with your construing unprepared. You tried to learn it, did you? Yes—for about ten minutes, I suppose. You must try to learn it again, and you must have the kindness to write it out in English and Greek three times. That will teach you to try a little harder.”

George sat down, looking very black at this sentence, which meant no cricket for him that afternoon. Presently Mr Williamson, seeing that he was not happy, attempted to cheer him up by a kind of chaff which sometimes made George laugh and sometimes drove him wild.

“Kennedy,” he said, “you must tell that nursery-maid of yours to hear you say your lessons before she puts on your clean pinafore and lets you go out to play.”

“I haven’t got a nursery-maid,” replied George, angrily.

“Haven’t you? Who was that I saw wheeling you in the perambulator the other day? Just as I passed, you were crying because she wouldn’t give you her parasol to play with, and then she stooped down and said: ‘Georgey-Porgey, mustn’t be naughty, or he shall be whipped and have no supper.’ I suppose she sent you to bed, and that is the reason you haven’t learnt your construing.”

At this we laughed, and George scowled, and Mr Williamson saw that his fun wasn’t doing any good and changed his tone.

“Come, George, don’t be offended, old fellow. But, I say, seriously, you must do your work better, and as a beginning, let me see this imposition, very carefully done, to-morrow morning.”

George was not appeased, and when we left Mr Williamson’s room and went up to Mr Willoughby for mathematics, he was in that gloomy frame of mind with which we were all

too well acquainted, and which made Mr Williamson frequently quote a passage of Shakespeare about young gentlemen who were as sad as night.

We were sitting at our desks, waiting to be called up and going through the form of looking over our Euclid. I say the form, because the weather was very hot, and we were very restless, and most of us were in no humour for fagging. George was deluding himself that he was attending to his open book, but I saw him savagely cutting at a pen, and understood that I had better leave him alone. Grey, who sat next him, unfortunately did not perceive this. It must be remarked that Balbus at one end of the form had fallen asleep, overcome by the heat and by his exertions, and Lessing at the other end was endeavouring to awake him by a vigorous bombardment of paper pellets. Finding this ineffectual, he pinched the boy next him, and said, "Pass that up," meaning thereby to attack Balbus in a more forcible way. This signal was duly passed along the form, but George was half-way between Balbus and Lessing, and when Grey pinched him, he so little entered into the spirit of the joke, that he caught up his slate and aimed a blow at his neighbour. Grey ducked, the slate fell from George's hands, and smashed to pieces on the floor, making a great noise, and causing everybody in the room to look up.

"Who did that?" cried Mr Willoughby, and George stood up.

"What is the matter with you?"

"Nothing," said George, in his most disagreeable tone.

Mr Willoughby left his desk, and coming close to him, said in a low voice:

"I am afraid, Kennedy, you have forgotten what I said

to you about this. You seem to have been giving way to your temper again."

"No, I haven't," replied George, fiercely.

Mr Willoughby looked at him, and said nothing more than "sit down;" then went to his place.

"Never mind," whispered Grey. "If he wants to do anything to you, I'll tell him I pinched you. But why did you get into such a state about a bit of humbug?"

"You are always humbugging when a fellow wants to fag," rejoined George, in a wrathful whisper.

"Oh, come, I say! You know very well you weren't fagging any more than I was;" to which George gave no answer, but hid his face with his hands and looked hard at his book.

Mr Willoughby said nothing to him, but when school was over George remained behind. When he saw that all the other boys had gone, he went up to the master's desk and blurted out:

"I beg your pardon, sir. I was rude to you."

Mr Willoughby looked up, surprised and pleased.

"Never mind," he said, kindly. "I dare say it won't happen again. We will say no more about it."

George waited for a minute, as if he still wanted to come out with something.

"I was sure—at least I hoped you would be sorry for the tone in which you spoke to me. I intended to have said something to you about it, after you had had time to reflect and get over your irritation, and you have saved me a little unpleasantness by this frank way of entering upon the matter."

"I didn't mean to do it, sir; but I didn't know my lesson, and Mr Williamson gave me an imposition, and that



made me angry, and I didn't know what I was saying—and—I shall try not to do it again."

"I am sure you will. I know you have been trying to conquer your temper; for I suppose, Kennedy, you will acknowledge that you have rather a bad temper? You have been very much more obedient and cheerful towards me of late; though, to tell the truth, I had rather you showed your temper towards me who can punish you for it, than towards a helpless boy like Dunnismore, so much smaller than yourself."

George winced and bit his lip at this hint, and for a moment felt inclined to go away without saying what he intended. But he had made up his mind.

"Will you punish me, sir?" he asked, abruptly.

"Punish you? Oh, no! I think that will not be necessary."

"It's no use," said George, vehemently. "I am sorry at the time, and I say that I won't do it again, and then I get in a—I mean, I feel—you know what I mean—and then it comes out. I wish you would punish me, sir, and there's less chance of my doing it again."

"But, my boy, you are imposing on me a very unpleasant task. I am glad to see that you are in earnest; but can you not trust to your own resolution?"

"I'm sure to do it again, sir. I really want you to do something to me."

"What am I to do to you?" asked Mr Willoughby, looking unhappy. "I have punished you more than once, and you didn't seem to care much."

"I don't mind the cane so much, sir," said George, looking up with a half smile. "It is all over in a minute or two. But if you would keep me in for a week between

twelve and one, and give me some work to do, I should not forget that in a hurry."

Mr Willoughby thought for a minute, and replied :

"Very well. I shall do as you ask me, and I sincerely trust it may have the effect you desire, and I desire, too ; for I hope I need not tell you, Kennedy, that it gives me the greatest pleasure to see you making a brave and honest effort to overcome your faults."

"I try, sir," burst out George. "At least, I have begun to try ; but it's very hard. I sometimes think I have managed it. I believe I will never do such a thing again, and I feel pleased with myself for a little, and then—"

George's words failed him, but the master understood what he meant. He took two turns across the room, then stopped and held the boy's hand.

"Kennedy," he said, earnestly, "we all have our sins to answer for, to be forgiven, to fight against. We all find it hard to overcome them. We are all, young and old, too apt to be proud and self-trustful ; and you are not too young to know that if we repent of our sins, we shall not seek in vain for God's forgiveness and help."

George said nothing, but his eyes glistened. He was thinking of what his mother said to him when he came to school.





## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MORE SUSPICIONS.

**W**E were not kept long in school on the morning when the conversation mentioned in the last chapter, between Sarjent, Grey, and the other fellows took place; and when we heard what had happened, we grumbled that we should have been kept in school at all. A letter to the head-master from Henderson, an old boy, arrived to say that he had won an important scholarship at Cambridge, and request a holiday for us in honour of the event. The post had been late, and the letter had gone to Mr Dalton's house, so it was not brought to him at the school till nearly ten o'clock; but as soon as he had read it he dismissed his form, sent for all the boys into the large schoolroom, announced the good news, and added the no less welcome information, that as it was a fine day and there was no time like the present, we might proceed to enjoy our holiday at once. So giving three cheers for Henderson, we shoved our books into our desks, and ran out in high glee; not that there were wanting discontented spirits who held that we had been fraudulently

deprived of an hour's play, and that Henderson might justly complain that his success had not been celebrated with due distinction. The opinion of the general public, however, was that so much of a bird in hand was preferable to a whole one in the bush.

Most of us went off to bathe and spent a pleasant hour in the society of the fishes, whom we voted to have decidedly the best of it that hot forenoon. Then we went to cricket. Then we went to dinner. Then we went to cricket again, but were soon obliged to come running home with the collars of our jackets turned up to our ears, for a series of heavy thunderstorms suddenly began to darken the blue sky, and, at intervals during the rest of the day, the rain came down in such torrents that playing out of doors was out of the question.

This was very disgusting, for what was the use of a holiday if not to play. And as we had almost no lessons to prepare for next day, there was nothing to be done but to pervade the whole house with noise and mischief in our train, and vex our worthy matron's soul. Fancy that poor woman's position, shut up like Daniel in the lions' den with some dozens of noisy boys, full of spirits and energy, and with nothing to do. It was all very well for Mr Willoughby. He had his own rooms, removed from our din, into which we did not penetrate rashly nor without due reverence ; but Mrs Bramble dwelt among us, and from the character of her duties and her good nature was exposed to inflictions of our society that must have been more frequent than agreeable. She would seldom be without a few visitors as she sat of an evening in her little parlour, occupying her time for the most part in darning the Priors' stockings and abusing Mrs Pearson. But on an occasion like this her

room would be full, and you would see a group in one corner playing a game of rudimentary cricket with a ball of worsted ; and in another would be two or three fellows teasing the cat ; and all about promiscuous boys talking and laughing, and pawing her Lares and Penates in a style that I shouldn't have allowed if I had been our matron. Then if you will imagine a Babel established in the schoolroom hard by, and the noise of constant shrieking and scrimmaging from the passages, and the trouble given by boys who every now and then came in drenched to the skin and wanted to have dry things put out for them, you will not wonder that Mrs Bramble declared herself driven wild that evening, and vowed that she would turn out the whole lot of them neck and crop if they worried her so much.

At length a happy thought came to her aid. She proposed that the boys should amuse themselves by acting a charade in the schoolroom, and succeeded in getting Les-sing and some other fellows to take it up. We all voted that it was a capital idea, and some volunteer carpenters set about making such preparations for the performances as were practicable ; while the boys who had undertaken to act retired into the matron's room to be dressed up. Our theatrical wardrobe was not large. A few rugs, dressing-gowns, and old hats were about the extent of it. Mrs Bramble produced an old dress and bonnet, in case a female character should be required ; and then there was plenty of burned cork, which goes a long way with juvenile audiences.

The boys' room at Pearson's was to a certain extent adapted for the unwonted use to which we proposed to turn it. At the higher end were two doors facing each other, one opening into the passage, the other into the dining-hall, and these would serve very well for exit and

entrance. Across this end of the room was rigged upon a clothes-line a curtain composed of dirty sheets. Scenery we had none, but in this respect we were no worse off than more celebrated actors in olden days. In previous efforts of this kind it had been always understood that when a chair was placed upon the stage, the scene was laid in a room, and that otherwise it was out of doors. And seeing that the drama, as cultivated at Whitminster Grammar School, chiefly relied upon terrific combats and such simple devices, the want of scenery was not much noticed. At the other end of the room were ranged the benches and tables by way of pit and boxes, and there the audience sat and howled, and whistled, and waited impatiently for the appearance of the performers, who in the matron's room were quarrelling about what they should act. It was so difficult to fix upon a word. Then everybody had his own notion of how it should be acted. Lessing wanted to do a scene from Shakespeare; Phillips would be satisfied with nothing less than a murder, in which he should stab his rival and then gracefully commit suicide; George Kennedy thought a broadsword combat was the *rôle* which would best suit him and please the spectators; Tom Cane was very anxious to have a trial and play the part of a barrister; Balbus was ambitious of performing a grand historical drama, and suggested that the massacre of the Hottentots on St Bartholomew's Day would make a splendid scene. At length they came to an agreement, and the performances were announced as just about to begin.

First the gas was turned down, then a great deal of whispering was heard behind the curtain, which at length with a jerk was pulled back and disclosed the stage furnished with a form and a mapstand. After a short interval, during

which more whispering went on, there appeared Ben Cane provided with a high hat, a long overcoat, and a large ruler, and proceeded to walk across the stage in an uncertain manner.

"Hallo, Balbus!"

"Hush, we've begun!" replied Balbus, looking very serious and holding his ruler as if he weren't quite sure what to make of it.

"Who are you? Are you the stage manager?" asked one of the audience.

"No; I'm a detective," said Balbus, continuing his promenade and trying to be indifferent to the remarks which were made upon him from the front. Then an angry whisper behind the side-scenes could be heard all over the room.

"Hide yourself, you donkey! You have got to hide!"

In obedience to this direction, Balbus got behind the mapstand, and there entered Tom Cane and Lessing, whom, from their disreputable garments and blackened countenances as well as from the solemn and stealthy way in which they crossed the stage on tiptoe, we at once understood to be very desperate characters. After having looked around suspiciously and carefully searched every spot except that where the detective was very evidently concealed, they set down a basket and extracted therefrom an axe, a bar of iron, and a dark lantern. Advancing with these dangerous implements to the door of the dining-hall, they went through an operation which there was reason to believe stood for breaking into a house. Having with great efforts forced the door open a little way, one of them disappeared by the other entrance and presently returned, dragging in a small boy with his arms tied and his mouth

muffled up in a comforter. The child wept as they unbound him, and struggled to escape, but the villains were hard-hearted ; one dragged him to the house, the other held a peashooter to his head and threatened to blow out his brains ; then they shoved him through the opening that had been made, and presently he was understood to return and open the door for the thieves, the first of whom disappeared through it, leaving Tom Cane to keep watch outside.

It seemed clear that the detective was now expected to do something, but Balbus did not prove equal to the occasion. He remained behind the mapstand, peacefully acquiescing in these illegal proceedings, and would not come out for some time, though we could distinctly hear his brother prompting him to make his appearance.

“Now, then, you must seize me !”

“Go at him, Ben !” we cried, by way of encouragement, and at length the detective emerged from his lurking-place and set about arresting the robber in a very unbusinesslike manner. A fearful struggle took place, which ended in the scoundrel being overcome and handcuffed with a steel watch-chain ; and at this point a general alarm was given, and out of the house came bundling, first, robber No. 1 in charge of another policeman, then half-a-dozen little boys with bare legs and long nightshirts, and lastly, Lessing as the alarmed mistress of the mansion with an enormous nightcap and a bedroom candle, screaming and fainting and embracing her little ones in a most comical manner. Upon this scene of alarm and confusion the curtain was dropped or rather pulled, and we were left to puzzle out the charade. It was confidently predicted that the word would prove to be *Housebreaker*, though there was one boy who thought that the first syllable must be *Oliver Twist*.



We had not long to wait for the second act. The curtain was drawn with a jerk, and revealed a rude bed composed of two forms and a railway rug. Nevertheless, from the conversation of Phillips, who was discovered in female attire, and Kennedy in his shirt sleeves, we learn that we are at a very first-class hotel, and that we have before us the landlady and the boots of the establishment. A whistle is heard without, then the ringing of a bell and other noises, and it is intimated that a train has just arrived. Enter Tom Cane, wrapped up in many coats and comforters, and bearing a carpet bag and a hat box. All the servants of the hotel appear upon the scene and zealously relieve him of his encumbrances; the landlady, advancing and courtesying, begins to make suggestions about dinner. But the traveller says that he wishes to go to bed at once, and begs that his rest may not be interrupted, as he is ill and weary. The attendants withdraw, and he composes himself to sleep. But in vain. First a cock is heard crowing; then a bell rings here and another there, and from all parts of the hotel come mingled shouts of "Boots! Waiter! Landlady!" Violent disputes are heard in the passages; boots are being flung at somebody's head, there is a crash of crockery just by the bedroom door. A dog barks fiercely, and a poultry yard of ducks and geese join the chorus outside. The unhappy traveller jumps up, rages, tears his hair, stamps, strides about the room, bellows for the landlady, searches for the bell, but the din goes on. At length in despair he flings himself once more on the bed, and tries to bury his head beneath the pillow. Just then another train is heard whistling and puffing into the adjacent station, and a second traveller enters, similarly equipped with wraps and luggage, and demands possession of his bedroom. The previous

occupant gets up, storms, orders the intruder to begone, sends for the landlady. The two rivals seize her, pull her to pieces, demand instant possession of the room which they each claim to have engaged. The poor woman protests, cries, implores, struggles, doesn't know what to do. The room, she admits, was engaged for Mr Tomkins. But both the travellers claim the name of Tomkins. The quarrel deepens ; they threaten actions, the police, violence ; one seizes the poker, the other the candlestick. In rush the Boots and other officials of the establishment, and proceed to interfere noisily. Peace is restored, and a sudden thought strikes the first traveller. "Your name is Tomkins?" "Yes." "You have a strawberry mark under your left arm?" "Yes." "I recognise that wart on your nose—my long lost brother!" The two Tomkineses fling themselves into each other's arms and weep for joy. The landlady and her servants rejoice demonstratively. Tableau. [Aside—"Pull that curtain—look sharp, will you?" ] Loud applause.

Some delay now taking place before the next act, we amused ourselves by a little boxing and single-stick, and made Cane wroth by peeping behind the curtain. At length the actors were ready, and when the curtain was drawn we saw Balbus in a black tail-coat and white necktie, sitting behind a large book which he was pretending to read through Mrs Brambles' spectacles. To him enter Lessing, dressed as a fashionable lady in the matron's oldest gown, and leading Tom Cane, who wore a jacket much too small for him, and cried and kicked and had to be pulled along, like a naughty, spoilt child that he was.

"I believe you keep a school, Dr Cramem," began the lady, taking a seat, after in vain waiting a minute to be offered one.

"Yes, ma'am," said the learned doctor, very meekly.

"I have brought you my little boy. I wish to put him at your school."

"Very well, ma'am," said Dr Cramem, and the boy set up a wail, and informed his mamma in a loud whisper that he should kick if they tried to pull one of his teeth out.

A long and awkward pause now took place. Balbus had been instructed to inquire into the attainments of his new pupil, but he forgot what to say, and was not to be prompted by the coughs and winks of his visitor. At length he came out with—

"I suppose you want him to learn all the usual things."

"Oh, yes, of course! And about the terms?"

"Five shillings a month," said Balbus, after reflection.

"Very good! The only thing I should like to mention is that my boy is rather delicate and will require a good deal of attention. I shouldn't wish him to be at his lessons for more than one hour a day."

"Certainly not, ma'am."

"Then I should like him to have two hot dishes for breakfast, and a glass of wine and a biscuit at eleven o'clock, and champagne at dinner, and a little calf's-foot jelly between tea and supper, just to keep up the dear boy's strength. I hope I shall not be giving you too much trouble."

"Oh no!"

"And will you see that he always wears goloshes, and never goes into the playground without his comforter?"

"All right. I'll look after him."

"Indeed, it might be best for him not to go out at all. Perhaps you wouldn't mind him sitting in your study while the other boys are playing. I am so afraid of his poor chest."

"I won't let him go out, ma'am."

"Then, as for learning, I really don't know about his taking every subject. I don't approve of boys working too hard, do you?"

"I think it's humbug," said the doctor.

"Well, why should he do arithmetic. It isn't any good except to clerks and people of that sort. I should like him to do everything, but not arithmetic."

"It's all bosh," agreed the pedagogue.

"And writing! Why should a young gentleman learn writing. I shall come and see my boy every second day, so I don't want him to write to me, and I shouldn't like him to dirty his pretty fingers. Let him learn everything except writing."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And now that I think of it, I don't believe I care for him reading much. Nothing is so bad for the eyes as staring at books."

"I never do it, m'am."

"I see you and I agree, doctor, in our notions of education. Well, then, I wish my boy not to have writing, reading, and arithmetic, but he must learn everything else."

"I'll make him learn it."

"Not unless he wishes to learn, remember. I don't wish to have him punished or anything of that sort. And if he is unhappy at school, poor dear, he must just tell me, and I shall take him away."

The lady now rose to depart, and there was a most affecting farewell scene between her and the boy, in the middle of which the curtain was drawn, and we were left puzzling over the word. "Housebreaker" was out of the question, for we were told that there were to be in all six

acts, one for each syllable, and one for the whole word. The only guess we could make was *Hippopotamus*.

Act four came to a premature termination. The scene was evidently a ship, and there appeared on board thereof a lady and gentleman, who announced that they were going to take a cruise. Two officers in paper cocked hats stalked about and gave orders through speaking trumpets to a gang of the "cubs," who represented their men. These latter were evidently under the influence of an idea that acting consisted in running up and down and making a noise, and they did this to such purpose that they spoilt the whole scene. Tom Cane was seen rushing about kicking and cuffing them, but his attempts to restrain their zeal were in vain, and, just as Lessing was beginning to be sick in a highly comic and effective manner, the curtain was drawn, and we lost the benefit of what was going to come.

For some time we were entertained by sounds of altercation behind the scenes, and when at length the curtain rose for the next act the rank and file of the actors seemed to be under better discipline. This time we evidently had before us a playground, and all the company, dressed in each others jackets, were playing at leap frog. Presently two of them were seen to quarrel, and, after a few wrathful words, proceeded to take off their jackets and make preparations for a fight. A ring was formed, and the combatants were beginning to spar in a dramatic rather than a scientific manner, when from the side door out popped Lessing with a high hat on his head to signify that he was a master.

"I am sorry to see anything of this kind," he said, in tones that were quite familiar to us. "Don't you know that fighting is forbidden by the rules? I don't wish to be severe, but really I can't allow this."

No sooner had Lessing finished this speech than his eyes fell on a new spectator, no less a person than Mr Willoughby, who, hearing of what was going on, had just entered the room with a friend of his. This friend, it must be known, was a certain Mr Luddington, son of one of the Whitminster clergymen, and himself a master at Coleworth School. We looked at Mr Willoughby to know how he would take it, and seeing him smile, the audience burst out into a roar of laughter, and Lessing, disconcerted only for a moment, changed his voice and began to imitate Mr Williamson.

"How dare you behave in this abominable way? I'll teach you, sir, to disobey me. You are very much mistaken if you think you are to set the discipline of the school at defiance. Come here, this moment!"

"It wasn't me, sir. It was him."

"No it wasn't. Don't believe him, sir."

"Not another word, Kennedy; I am sure you are to blame; you are always making a disturbance. Come here into my room directly."

Kennedy followed him, weeping, and his companions ranged themselves at the side of the stage and waited anxiously to see or hear what would become of him. Then from the side scenes came the sound of six smart whacks, each of which was followed by a loud "Oh!" and at last by mournful blubbering and exclamations of "Please don't!" "I *will* be good!" "I'll never do it again, sir!" while the chorus outside uttered exclamations of interest and sympathy. The tragedy was thus finished in a strictly classical manner, though we guessed that there would have been a satirical epilogue if it had not been for Mr Willoughby's presence.

Now appeared upon the stage Mr Phillips, who ran his finger through his hair, and announced to the ladies and gentlemen that the whole word **was** about to be acted and that the scene **was** supposed to be a desolate island. When the curtain was again drawn back, we saw Lessing rolling on the floor and making strange contortions which we presently perceived to represent swimming. He landed on the shore of the desert island and stood up. Then he unfolded an umbrella and expressed his joy that he had saved it from the wreck. A basket was pushed upon the stage, and Lessing, tucking up his trousers, advanced boldly into the surf and fished it out with the handle of the umbrella. Having executed a dance of triumph round it, he opened the basket and produced from it a frying-pan, a loaf of bread, a box of matches, a candlestick, a straw hat, a brown teapot, a pea-shooter, and a hair-oil bottle full of peas. With these utensils and weapons he hastened to establish himself behind the map-stand, where he was proceeding to light a fire of paper, when Mrs Bramble rose in her place among the audience and vehemently protested against this form of entertainment. Then appeared a monkey with a long tail, and the shipwrecked mariner issued forth in pursuit. The chase was long and exciting, and, just as he had caught the monkey by the tail, the said appendage gave way, and it escaped, which truly comic incident brought down the house. Next came a nondescript animal, consisting of young Wood wrapped in a railway rug, who was speedily despatched by a deadly shot from the unerring pea-shooter, and was about to be cut up with a dinner-knife, when a fearful howling announced the arrival of a band of savages, got up for the part by having their faces blackened and wearing their jackets turned inside out. The savages

entered and set to work yelling and jumping all over the island. Lessing fled behind the map-stand and was seen trembling at the ferocious gestures and grimaces of his neighbours. When they at length prepared to depart, he summoned courage to peep out and with his pea-shooter brought down the hindermost one, while the rest fled panic-stricken. He lifted up the wounded man, carried him to the hut, and crammed down his throat a box full of bread pills. Having thus restored him to health, he at once set him to work on the household duties, and would no doubt have completely civilised him in a minute or two if the savages had not unexpectedly returned. Then ensued a promiscuous *mêlée*, in which everybody seemed to get the worst of it, and first the map-stand and then the curtain were pulled down. The excitement became general, and the audience began to take part in the performance by pelting the actors with slippers, and somebody shouted out that the word was ROBINSON CRUSOE (*rob-inn-son-cruise-oh!*); and in this way came to an end the great and striking and original dramatic entertainment of which I have tried to give an account.

It may be thought that I ought not to have given an account of it at all, seeing that we have evidently come to an exciting and interesting point in the story, and one at which it does not become an author to turn aside and set on a certain number of barren spectators to laugh. But in my bushel of chaff there is a grain of wheat that will help to bake the solid part of my tale.

Marshall was going upstairs into his study when Tom Cane stole up to him in a state of great importance and excitement, and whispered:

"Come into the hat-room, presently, and take care that



no fellow sees you. Pretend that your nose is bleeding."

Marshall wasn't fond of mystery. He liked to go straight to the point, so without delay he followed Caius to the hat-room and asked what he wanted.

"Hush!" said Cane, shutting the door and leading him to the furthest corner. "I want to say something to you."

"Why couldn't you say it in the other room, then? These fellows were making such a din that none of them would have been any the wiser."

"It is a matter of great importance," said Cane, solemnly. "Look here, Marshall, we had better turn down the gas in case some fellow comes to see who is here. When we were acting just now, I put on Kennedy's jacket, and I felt a biggish book in the inside pocket, and I pulled it out and found that it was my own Euclid. I missed it this afternoon. Isn't that odd?"

Marshall indulged in a whistle.

"Do you know I am sure it must have been Kennedy who took all these books, though I should never have thought it was him."

"Did you speak to him about it?"

"Yes. I said, 'Holloa, you have my Euclid here!' and he said it wasn't, and then I showed him my name on it, and he declared he had taken it out of his own desk and never noticed the difference. But how did it come into his desk, that's the thing? I looked at him very hard, but he turned away and pretended not to think anything more about it. I never saw anything like the coolness of the fellow; but do you know, Marshall, I have heard my father say that innocent people look confused when they are accused of

anything, and guilty ones don't. Doesn't it seem suspicious?"

"It does, indeed. And do you know, Cane, Dunnismore and I have been talking over this thing to-day, and we have thought of something else that is uncommonly suspicious. We wanted to tell you about it. Where is Dunny?"

"Let us get a hold of him and have a quiet consultation in my study before supper."

"By-the-bye, we can't see him. He had a headache and went to bed while you were acting. But come along with me and I'll tell you all about it."

It was true that Dunnismore had gone to bed; I don't think it was true that he had a headache, but he said he had. This headache came on almost immediately after our master, along with Mr Luddington, had entered the school-room, yet not so soon but that Mr Luddington caught a glimpse of him as he was slipping off, and said to his friend:

"Is that boy's name not Dunnismore?"

"Yes; do you know him?"

"He was one of my boys at Coleworth for a short time."

"Indeed! That's very odd. I never heard he had been at Coleworth. One would think we should have known about it, somehow," said Mr Willoughby.

Mr Luddington said nothing. He knew a reason for the Whitminster masters not having learned that Dunnismore was once a Coleworth boy, and he was debating with himself whether he ought to mention it.





## CHAPTER XIX.

### ACCUSATION.

**N**EXT day the whole school was again summoned together just before twelve o'clock, and this time Mr Dalton had not such agreeable news to give.

"Boys, I grieve to say that there must be a thief among us."

Seldom was there such sudden and complete silence in the large schoolroom. The boys held their breath, and many of them looked round at each other's faces, as if they expected to discover the thief in this way. We of Pearson's house made an effort to appear unconcerned, but we had an uneasy consciousness that the suspicion lay chiefly among us. We were not surprised, though; for at the "quarter"—our short scrap of play at eleven o'clock—the rumour had spread that the masters had taken up this matter and that there was going to be a great row.

"I hope," continued Mr Dalton, "that the rest of you feel as much pained as I do at this imputation upon any one of us. But I fear there can be very little doubt about the matter; and, for the unhappy boy's own sake, as well as for

our own satisfaction and for the well-being of the school, we must all do our utmost for the discovery of the offender. So long as he is not discovered, there will be a cloud of suspicion and disgrace upon every one of us.

"Perhaps many of you know that for some little time there have been complaints about money and other articles being missed, especially in one boarding-house. There has been reason to believe that books also have been stolen lately. Unfortunately there can now be no doubt of this, for two of the books so missed were this morning found in the shop of a second-hand bookseller, who says he bought them from a boy some days ago.

"I told you just now that I was grieved to come to the conclusion that we had a thief among us, but I cannot tell you *how* much grieved I am. Till now, these suspicions have been, wrongly, I think, concealed from the masters, and they have utterly taken me by surprise. I really do not know what to say to you on such a painful subject. If the boy who has caused us this pain is here, let me tell him that his wisest course will be a full and frank confession. His punishment cannot but be severe; but in such a case the severest punishment would be more merciful than his being allowed to pursue unchecked this fatal path of evil doing. Let him be assured of this, that no pains will be wanting to discover him. He must feel that he has cut himself off from the help and sympathy of his school-fellows; and I know that I can confidently ask them to communicate to me any information which may be of use in detecting him."

Mr Dalton's eye ran along the rows of faces that were turned towards his desk, but in none of them could he read any sign of conscious guilt. Repeating his request that we

should let him know anything by which any of us might be able to assist in making the matter clear, he dismissed the school, and we streamed out into the playground and began to discuss the matter after our own fashion.

There was quite an assembly under one of the large elm trees by the cloisters, and after talking for two minutes to George, who was kept in, I was minded to join it and hear what was going on. But I found Marshall, Leake, Sarjent, and one or two more of the big fellows driving away all but a select few who were considered worthy to constitute a court of inquiry; and when I approached, I was roughly told to be off. This was very insulting, for they were allowing Dunnismore to stay, and he was much smaller and more insignificant than I considered myself; but there was no resisting the command of such dignitaries, so off I went among some wiseacres of my own rank in the school, who were putting their heads together elsewhere. Nevertheless, I am able to give a full report of what passed at the superior council.

"Now, then, Cane; who is the fellow you suspect?"

"Marshall will tell you."

"Hang all this mystery," cried Leake. "Can't you come out with it at once? What is this suspicion that you are making such a work about?"

"I don't suspect anybody," said Marshall. "I know it was—"

"Well! Who?"

"George Kennedy!"

"Your grandmother!" cried Lessing, scornfully; and most of the others seemed to share his surprise.

"George Kennedy! Oh, nonsense! You must have made a mistake."

"Mistake!" exclaimed Marshall. "The only mistake is that he has mistaken other fellows' books for his own, and he has mistaken a sovereign out of my desk, and he has mistaken no end of other things. A very queer kind of mistake, indeed!"

"Look here," said Tom Cane. "Of course we never should have suspected a fellow like Kennedy without good reason. But when once I got a clue and began to look up evidence, I found that everything told against him. I shall just show you fellows the proofs we have, and I think you will agree with me that they are uncommonly strong. Of course I shall be very glad if it turns out that we are on a wrong scent."

"Stop a minute. Where is Kennedy? I don't think it is fair to accuse a fellow behind his back."

"Where is he? That's just the thing," cried Marshall. "Kept in by Mr Willoughby. He asked to be kept in every day this week from twelve till one, that he might have a chance of bagging our books."

"I believe that's all bosh about his asking to be kept in."

"Well, all the fellows say so, and he never denied it. Now, a fellow doesn't ask to be punished except he has some good reason, I say."

"I suppose the truth of the matter is that Edwyn Philip asked him if he would rather be caned or be kept in, and——"

"And he chose to be kept in for a week in this splendid weather, with cricket practice going on every day. Very likely! Catch him stopping in unless it was to have the run of our desks."

"But, do you know, I won't swear that the book I have lost was taken from my desk," said Grey. "When we have

Euclid in the mornings, I generally leave my other books in the passage by Williamson's room, to be ready when I am going home."

"Kennedy generally keeps his books there, too, in the forenoon," said Dunnismore. "It would be easy for him to pop one of yours among his own."

"As for that," said Leake, "we know fellows have their books lying all about the place, and a fellow who wanted to steal would have lots of chances."

"Is this all the evidence you have?" asked Lessing. "First you accuse Kennedy because he gets himself shut up in the schoolroom; then you make out that the books fellows have lost weren't stolen from the schoolroom. You'll want to talk a good bit longer before you persuade me that Kennedy has been stealing things. Ladies and gentlemen, I have known him since he was a baby in arms—I mean a cub in the second form. Unaccustomed as I am to public swearing, I'll promise to eat my hat if you can make out anything against Kennedy."

"Don't talk nonsense, Monkey, and listen to the proofs we have. First, you will agree, I suppose, that there is likely to be only one fellow in the school who steals these things?"

"Yes; and that one isn't Kennedy."

"What was the first time that anything was missed? Wasn't it one day at the end of last term, when a lot of fellows in the fourth form went out to bathe with Mr Williamson, and Williamson said half-a-sovereign had been stolen from his purse? Afterwards he thought he had been mistaken, but now we know that he wasn't; and we may guess that the fellow who steals things is in the fourth form."

"There are a great many fellows in the fourth form," said Lessing.

"And a great many fools," sneered Marshall. .

"Well, next we hear of money being stolen at our boarding house. You are right enough that there are a good many fellows in the fourth form, upper and lower, but of all the fourth-form fellows who live at Mrs Pearson's, I believe there is only one who has not lost something himself, and that one is Kennedy."

"You mean who has not said he had lost something. If I wanted to steal money, I should begin by losing a lot myself."

"That's not all, Lessing. When a row is made about it up at Pearson's, the stealing stops there, and after a while the fellow begins to bag other fellows' books down at the school. We hear that one fellow has got himself kept in every day and can help himself to anything he pleases in the school, for there isn't one desk in twenty has a lock. That fellow is Kennedy."

"What do you say to that?" added Marshall, triumphantly. "And you know two of the books have been found at old Styles' shop, and he thinks it was Kennedy who brought them to him."

"Do you mean to say he knew Kennedy by name?"

"No; but he seemed to recognise him when I described him."

"I don't believe it," said Lessing, bluntly. "Everybody knows that old Styles is as stupid as an owl and as blind as a bat."

"At all events, he was pretty sure the boy hadn't a college cap on. Now, everybody knows that Kennedy lost his trencher a little while ago and has been wearing a straw hat."



"Everybody knows that lots of fellows wear straw hats in the summer. And nobody with any sense would steal books from the school and then put on his school cap when he went to sell them."

"The next thing is that Dunnismore saw him coming away from school yesterday with no end of a lot of books in his strap."

"Of course he was carrying home his own books."

"No ; but he had a lot of other fellows'."

"How do you know that, Dunnismore ?" asked Leake. "Are you quite sure he had more books than his own ?"

"No ; I'm not sure, but I thought his strap seemed very full of books."

"He's the only fellow in the fourth form who does carry his books in a strap," said Cane.

"You're out there, for I do," put in Grey.

"I mean the only boarder. I wasn't speaking of day boys," said Cane, with a slight touch of contempt.

"What on earth has that got to do with it ?" cried Lessing. "If he stole books, it would be the silliest thing he could do to carry them about in a book strap. He would hide them in his pockets, as you genteel fellows do, Caius."

"I'm coming to that——"

"Well, it's high time you came to something. Here you are imputing all kinds of suspicion against Kennedy, because he is in the fourth form, and because he carries his books in a strap, and because he has been kept in, and because of all sorts of humbug. Why don't you say he stole these books because he had the measles last year, or because his grandmother will be a hundred and ninety-nine next birthday. It would be just as sensible."

"You are just a donkey!" declared Marshall. "To my mind, the thing is as plain as possible. Don't you think so, Leake?"

"It looks very queer, certainly. But surely——"

"Wait a bit. Cane hasn't told you the worst thing of all."

"Why, last night I put on Kennedy's jacket when we were acting, and in the inside pocket was my Euclid, right enough."

"There!" cried Marshall.

"Fancy! Did you ask him about it?"

"Yes, and he pretended he had taken it out of his own desk. How did it come into his desk, I should like to know?"

"Did he seem confused or put out when you told him?" asked Sarjent.

"Well—not exactly; but I thought he looked queer."

"I am sure I have seen him looking very guilty while we were talking about the thefts," said Marshall. "The other day, I said he must have done it. I was only in fun, and he flew out into such a wax."

"And when it was first mentioned that something had been stolen, he said it was nonsense and tried to get the fellows to think nothing of it. Now, then, Mr Lessing?"

"Well, there is something about it all that I can't understand," said Lessing; "but I am sure it will turn out in the end that Kennedy has no more to do with it than the Minster clock. I believe some of you fellows have taken a spite against him, and choose to imagine that he looked so and so and said so and so, and all the rest of it."

"You have no right to say that," cried Cane. "I have been looking out for the fellow who stole that money for a

long time, and if I had a spite against Kennedy, I should have accused him before this."

"Accuse away as much as you like. You won't make me believe it."

"That's all very well, Lessing," said Leake; "but we are bound to find out what we can about this affair, and I must say that we ought to speak to Kennedy, at all events."

"Why, here he is!" exclaimed somebody.

And in fact Kennedy was walking towards them, whistling a tune and gaily swinging the book strap which it was beneath the dignity of some fourth-form fellows to carry.

"What are you fellows confabulating about?" he asked. "Have you found out anything about these books?"

"Do you know anything about them, Kennedy?" said Leake.

"Not I. I wish some fellow would steal all our books, and then we shouldn't have to do lessons. You are looking very mysterious, Cane. What's the matter?"

"We think we have found a clue to the thief," said Cane, while the others whispered together, and nobody cared to inform George of what had been said, till Lessing came out with—

"I say, Kennedy; some of these fellows have the cheek to say that you took them."

"Me! Took what? What do you mean? Who says so?"

"I say it," cried Marshall.

"Liar!" called out George, flushing crimson.

"Look how red he gets," whispered Cane.

"It's no good stamping and spitting like a wild cat," said Marshall. "You can't frighten me, George Kennedy, and I know all about your goings on. The fellows all know



““ Me! took what? What do you mean? Who says so?”—GEORGE'S ENEMIES,  
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that you took these books. Cane's Euclid was found in your pocket last night, and you have half-a-dozen other fellows' books in that strap just now, I dare say."

"Show him your strap, George," said Lessing.

"Indeed I won't. I'd like to see any fellow dare to look at my books," cried George, glaring like a wild beast upon the whole group.

"Would you," replied Marshall, making an attempt to snatch the books out of his hands.

George tried to strike him on the face, but his arm was held by Leake. The strap was torn away from his left hand, and in the struggle the books escaped from it and fell on the ground. Then Sarjent sprang forward and pounced upon one of them.

"Why, here is my verse-book. See—my name on the title-page—'T. Sarjent,' scored through with ink!"

"I don't know how that came into my strap—I never put it there," stammered George.

"None of your acting! I knew we should find you out."

"Don't, Marshall," said Leake. "Look here, Kennedy, I am bound to say that all this seems to show that you took these books, and, of course, we must speak to Mr Dalton about it."

"Tell him as many lies as you like," cried George contemptuously. "Dalton is not such a fool as to believe you," and with that he picked up his books and strode off, holding his head in the air, and taking no further notice of his accusers. In a minute or two Lessing followed him, and the others walked slowly away, telling one another that they could never have believed it, and everywhere communicating the startling news that it turned out to be George Kennedy who had stolen the books.

Dunnismore left the side of his patron Marshall, and walked into the town. As he was coming back he met Phillips looking very excited. No wonder, for he had just attained the glory of seeing himself in print.

"Oh, Dunnismore, have you seen!" he cried, waving a newspaper above his head. "The *Whitminster Times* has put in my new poem."

"They must have been hard up for something to put in," said Dunnismore unsympathisingly.

"Just listen a moment. What do you think of the first verse? Listen.

"Oh Mary, brightly shine thine eyes,  
Thy teeth are white as pearls,  
Thy raven locks are fairer far,  
Than any other girl's."

"There, that will do. It's great rubbish, Jemima."

"You don't know anything about it. I showed it to Kennedy and Ellis, and they thought it was very good," cried the insulted poet.

"Do you hear this row about Kennedy?"

"No—what's the matter?"

"It turns out that it was he who stole these books."

"No!"

"Yes, indeed. The fellows accused him of it, and he got as red as fire and wouldn't let them examine his book strap, but Marshall looked into it and found one of Sarjent's books."

"Why —" said Phillips, and then stopped.

"Of course, every fellow will believe that he took all the others, if it can be proved that he took this one. Don't you think so?"

"I don't believe he took this one," said Phillips, looking

hard at Dunnismore, and then looking away from him and saying in a hurried confused tone, "Why were you putting a book into Kennedy's strap?"

Dunnismore started and stopped.

"When we were playing at the quarter, a verse for a poem I am writing came into my head, and I went to find some place where I could be at peace to write it down. The fellows were making a great row everywhere, but at length I found a quiet corner behind the door of the passage from the cloisters. While I was standing there, first Kennedy passed through and put down his books on the window sill, then in a minute you came in and opened his strap and shoved a book into it among the others. I thought it was one of his books that he had lent you."

Dunnismore was vainly trying to hide his agitation. As Phillips went on he saw more and more clearly that his suspicions were just, and did not know what to say.

"Dunnismore!"

"It was one of his books. At least—I mean—it's a lie, Phillips; you know it's a lie. It must have been some other fellow you saw. I haven't been near that passage to-day—I mean, since we came from Williamson's."

"I am certain it was you, Dunnismore, and I have a pretty good idea of what you were doing there."

"I'll tell you afterwards what I was about? I wasn't touching Kennedy's books. You must have made a mistake. I say, Phillips, don't tell any of the fellows that you saw me there."

"Of course I shall tell," cried Phillips indignantly, and was moving away when Dunnismore caught him by the arm.

"Don't, Alwyn; please don't say a word about it. I have a reason."



"I know what the reason is," said Phillips, trying to shake him off. "Do you suppose I am going to help you if you have been trying to put a false charge on Kennedy."

"Listen to me a minute," said Dunnismore. "I don't think you ought to tell about me. Remember the eggs."

"Eggs!—What eggs?"

"Why, Mrs Pearson's eggs that you stole."

"What has that to do with it?"

"Look here, Phillips, if you say a word about seeing me in the passage, I'll come out with the whole story about the eggs. Mrs Pearson hasn't forgotten that, and if it is found out, you'll be expelled as sure as you are standing here."

It was Phillips' turn to look disconcerted.

"But this is quite different."

"It isn't. They'll say that if you steal one thing you will just as likely steal another. I can prove that you stole these eggs, and if you get me into a scrape, I'll get you in with me. I'll swear you stole these books, and I should like to know who would believe your word rather than mine. I'll tell them you stole that money—you know you did—I'll swear to anything. Phillips, you mustn't tell—you shan't tell—you daren't tell."

"Oh, Dunnismore!"

"Look here, Phillips, I'll go straight off to Mrs Pearson or somebody and accuse you of stealing the eggs and the books and everything. I can easily make them believe it was you, and I'll do it unless you swear this moment that you will never breathe to a single soul that you saw me in that passage. Will you promise?"

"Oh, Dunnismore!"



## CHAPTER XX.

### ASTONISHMENT.

“**G**EORGE Kennedy! Nonsense! Who says so?”  
“All the fellows. The books were found on him.”

“On Kennedy! Surely it’s a mistake,” exclaimed I.  
“Silence!” cried Mrs Pearson, looking towards us.  
“Smith, it is quite bad enough that you come in late for dinner; and I can’t have you disturbing us all by speaking so loud.”

I had just learned, for the first time, what had taken place. All the fellows were talking of it and casting curious glances at George, who sat bolt upright and looked before him with a defiant stare and a frown that showed the bitterness of his indignation.

“Take no notice of it, and the fellows will soon see that there is some mistake,” had been Lessing’s advice, which George was trying to follow; but his attempts at appearing indifferent were very unsuccessful.

I understood his feelings, and sat on thorns till dinner was over. I wanted to be with him, to ask him what

it all meant, to join him in raging against his calumniators. I never thought of telling him that I did not believe him guilty. That was a matter of course. I could as soon have been persuaded that the sun was black or that Euclid was amiable, as that George Kennedy could be a thief.

As soon as we were released, I made towards him, but he hurried off to his study, and I stopped at the foot of the stairs to ask how it all came about. A dozen tongues were eager to inform me, and I heard the story with several embellishments that in one hour had already been added to it. He had been found in the act of taking the books—of selling them—he had confessed about the stolen money—he had helped himself to a sovereign out of Williamson's purse while we were bathing—he was to be expelled—the police were to be sent for—none of the fellows were to speak to him. I could scarcely believe my ears. Even the unexaggerated account which Lessing gave me seemed utterly incredible.

"You cubs are talking a lot of nonsense about it," said Marshall. "It's a bad enough business, and you needn't make it worse. There is no doubt he stole the books. Dalton wouldn't believe it at first, but he had to, when we showed him our proofs."

As Kennedy's name was thus in everybody's mouth, he himself suddenly appeared among us, coming down the stairs with his bat over his shoulder. The little crowd fell back right and left to let him pass, but Marshall barred the way.

"Are you going to the cricket field?"

"Of course."

"Well, you can't."

"Can't! Why not?" cried George, fiercely.

"Because none of the fellows will play with a thief."

George dropped the bat and stood with clenched fists and flashing eyes. He was struggling with his passion and trying not to speak the hot words that rose to his lips. To me, who knew how hard it was for him to restrain his anger, he never looked so much like a hero; but no one else understood the feelings that were distracting him. Some of the boys were quite frightened at the expression of his face and shrunk back as if they expected a violent outbreak.

"I think you had better not go, Kennedy," said Ellis.

"Ellis! do all the fellows really think that I did this?" said George in a trembling voice; and then seeing his question answered on the faces round him, he burst out: "Have you all gone mad?"

"I am very sorry about it," said Ellis; "but I must say that there are very strong suspicions against you, and Mr Dalton thinks so too."

"And all this acting will do you no good," added Marshall.

George did not wait for this taunt; he could trust himself to hear no more, and was hurrying upstairs, flying not so much from Marshall, I believe, as from his own hot temper.

I followed him to his study, and found that he had begun to write a letter home. He had already flung one sheet of paper on the floor and blotted another, and in his agitation he was twisting the pen in his hand and breaking it to pieces.

"Do you hear the story these fools have got up against me?" he broke out.

"How on earth did it happen, George?"

"Happen? how do I know? I don't know what they mean? *Me* steal their books! Why, some fellow who has a spite against me put one of these books among mine, and that's how it is. It was Marshall—I'm sure it was Marshall—he hates me, and I hate him—and now he has got all the fellows to believe this story. You heard the brute accusing me of it the other day? I never thought he meant it. I'd like to—— Oh, Bob! could you believe that a fellow would be such a brute?"

George was striding about the little room like a lion in its cage, and swallowing great gulps of water from a can that happened to stand on the table.

"Tell me, do all the fellows believe this? Do they really believe it?"

I might have said that many of the fellows scarcely understood what had happened, but at the moment I was more anxious to show my sympathy than to comfort my friend, so I gave a rather discouraging answer.

"Never mind, George; I'll stick by you," I said, passing my arm through his; and then he broke down, and his passion relieved itself in a violent fit of tears.

He sat sobbing for several minutes, and I stood by and worked myself up to a state of indignation against his persecutors. Who would dare to say that this boy was a thief? I felt at that moment that I could have defied even Marshall himself; and it was well that no small, slanderous fellow was at hand to give me an opportunity of proving my belief in George's innocence! Now I had a chance of showing myself a true and warm friend, and was eager to rush into action.

"If they won't speak to you I won't speak to them," I declared, and began, in my turn, to stride up and down and

look desperate; and this kind of ardour, perhaps, helped to recover George from the weakness into which he had fallen.

"I'm a fool to let them worry me so much," he said, drying his tears. "I shan't take any more notice of them, and they can find out for themselves what a mistake they have made. Bob, you will help me to find out who put those books in my desk?"

"Of course I will, old fellow. I'll do anything for you. I'll show all these idiots that I know you couldn't do such a thing. They'll soon come to their senses."

"Does Dalton think I have done this, do you know?"

"They say so, but I don't believe it. Wait till he hears your story. I say, George, will you go down to school this afternoon as usual?"

"To be sure! I'm not going to let these fellows think they have frightened me. Let us go now, and be there in plenty of time. I'm not in a wax now, and I can tell Marshall that I know very well what he is up to."

"Do you think it was Marshall?"

"Who else could it have been? Now that I think of it, my books were lying in the passage downstairs all the second part of the morning, and it was the easiest thing in the world to put this one into my strap. Did you ever think a fellow could do such a thing? I'll go at once to Dalton—I declare I will. I won't speak to one of these fellows if they don't choose to believe me. They shall all come and beg my pardon for it some day. See if they don't!"

George washed his hands and brushed his hair, trying to remove all traces of his recent agitation, and we set out together for the school. In the lavatory we met Phillips,

who came up to us in a sort of shamefaced way and said :

" Kennedy, I am so sorry the fellows say this about you. I am sure you didn't do it."

" Thank you," said George, rather stiffly, and passed hurriedly on, for he had been screwing himself up to act a grand part of defiant innocence, and in this mood an expression of pity jarred upon him. A minute afterwards he said to me :

" Phillips is a good fellow," and I understood him to mean, " I wish I had been a little more polite to him."

I took his arm, and we walked down together. I thought he was doing wisely in facing his enemies and was determined to back him up as boldly as I could, but I could not help wondering at his courage. If I had been in the same situation, I felt that I would have shown less resolution. For, now that the first heat of his indignation had passed away, he was talking quite coolly about other subjects; and, indeed, it was only by his overdoing this air of carelessness that one could have suspected him to be lying under such a disgraceful charge. Yet the pain and disgrace must have been doubly keen to him who prided himself so much on his honour and rejoiced in his popularity. I knew what his feelings must have been, and longed to be able to tell him how sorry I was for him, but I saw that he wanted no more sentiment, and held my tongue. Then I began to be nervous about the scene that would doubtless take place in the playground. It was all very well for George to arrange for an exhibition of silent contempt, but I knew that a taunt or a sneer might suddenly overcome his resolution, and there would be a quarrel, perhaps a fight. I changed my mind, and thought it would be better if he did not show himself at

school. If only they could be kept from saying that he was afraid!

But if George had any doubt as to whether he ought to make his public appearance or not, the question was settled for him by circumstances of that kind which are commonly said to be beyond control. For as we passed by the wall that shuts off from the road the back of the Dean's garden, we found a small Lower-school boy, who, bareheaded and marked as to his face with tears, was gazing ruefully up at a projecting tree into which his cap had been flung. This was the termination of a series of injuries and insults to which he had just been subjected by a party of "the Coppers," who disappeared round the corner at our approach, leaving him to narrate his woes.

"I shall be late," whined young Carrison, "and Mr Young said he would lick me next time."

"Lots of time," said I; but George's compassion took a more active form.

"Never mind, cubby. I'll get your cap for you. Here, hold my books."

George swarmed up the wall, got in the tree, threw down the cap, then swung himself out to the end of the branch, dropped to the ground, and—sprained his ankle.

He gave one slight cry of pain, then rose and tried to go on, but could not, and we saw that there was really something the matter.

"I must go back. I have hurt my foot."

Young Carrison proposed to run off for all the doctors in Whitminster and half-a-dozen men to carry the sufferer to the hospital, but George told him not to make a fuss, and set his lips tight, and with our aid limped back to the school-house, luckily not far distant. I left him there in charge of



Mrs Bramble, and, being assured that it was only a sprain, I ran down again to school in hopes of not being late.

But I was late, and when I went up to give my excuse to Mr Dalton and told him of what had happened to Kennedy, he only said "Indeed!" in a tone that seemed to have an unpleasant meaning. Then, for the first time, it struck me that those who believed George guilty would say that the accident was not altogether accidental, and I was eager to defend him from this and every other slander. His friends were doubly bound to stand up for him, now that he could not speak for himself.

If I had never done more work than I did that afternoon, my education would have made but little progress at Whitminster. I was wrought up to a high pitch of excitement, and my mind kept running upon all possible theories of how this accusation could have arisen. Of course, an enemy of George's was at the bottom of it, but who was this enemy, and how was he to be detected and confounded? George himself had evidently suspected Marshall, and Marshall and he were certainly not on very good terms, but somehow I did not think it could be Marshall. When I had turned the matter over in my mind, my suspicions began to direct themselves to another quarter. Why I thought of Abbing it would be hard to say, except that he had a bad name, which, moreover, had before been mentioned in connection with these thefts. Abbing would stick at nothing, he was always loafing about in dark holes and corners, such as the place where the stolen book had been slipped among Kennedy's; it was just like him to try to throw the blame of a crime on some one else when he thought himself likely to be found out. George had more than once given him cause of offence. I knew that he was often in difficulties

about money, and was always begging and borrowing and running into debt. The more I thought of it, the more sure I was that it must have been Abbing. I was impatient for school to be over that I might set out on this new track, and have the honour and delight of clearing my friend's character by my own zeal and ingenuity. And, to begin with, I got an imposition from Mr Williamson for inattention. This was real martyrdom, and I rather liked it than otherwise.

As soon as we were released I rushed off into the town. Most parts of it were forbidden ground to us except on certain days in the week, but I did not mind going out of bounds, and recklessly plunged through the chief streets, without fearing the face of master. Like other reckless people, I came safe through the danger, and arrived uncaught at Mrs Matthews' shop, a place not unknown to Whitminster boys and their friends.

"Mrs Matthews, I want to ask you a question—will you answer it?" I said, after purchasing some cherries by way of opening negotiations.

"I won't give any more credit, if that's it," replied Mrs Matthews very decidedly. "You young gentlemen owe me too much already, and, for all the profit I make, I wish I had never set eyes on one of you."

"It isn't about myself. It's Abbing. You remember—"

"Not another penny," interposed Mrs Matthews. "I told him so last week when he brought the half-crown, and he knows he promised me another yesterday."

This was just what I wanted to find out.

"Does Abbing owe you money?"

"Money? Don't you call seven-and-sixpence money? He has owed me that, and more, for a matter of three months. I tell him I shall complain about it, and then

he will perhaps bring me half-a-crown one time and half-a-crown another; but I can't get it all out of him. I'm a great deal too good-natured, I am, with young gentlemen, and that's a fact. If you were wanting credit for yourself I might perhaps put you down for a shilling or two till the end of the month; but as for Master Abbing, I don't want to see him in my shop again without he brings me my money. He said he would be sure to get it this week, but there's no believing some folks."

I did not wait to hear more, but hurried off home. Here was an important confirmation of my suspicions against Abbing. Of course he had been selling the books to raise these half-crowns which he paid Mrs Matthews. Naturally, when he could no longer get money in this way, he failed to keep his promise of paying her more. I had the clue—George would be freed from suspicion—I should have the credit of having cleared up this affair. And, as I ran along, I rehearsed to myself the scornful and convincing words in which, when I had my proofs all ready, I should denounce the real criminal and drive him forth from the bosom of our virtuous community.

But when I got to the school-house and was hastening to communicate this discovery to George, my eagerness received a check. Mrs Bramble informed me that Kennedy had been placed in the sick-room, and that by Mr Willoughby's orders none of the boys were to go to him. And when, heedless of this prohibition, I was scrambling upstairs to pay him a visit on the sly, I was met and turned back by the master himself, who seemed to be just coming from the sick-room.

"Please, sir, let me go to him," I pleaded. "I know he wishes to see me."

"No, Smith, I have forbidden it; and though I am pleased to see your affection for your friend, I cannot allow my orders to be disobeyed."

"You don't believe it, sir? Surely you don't think he could have taken these books and the money?"

"I hope he did not; I sincerely hope he did not," said Mr Willoughby. "It would be most distressing for me to know about a boy whom I have thought so well of, who was to have been confirmed in a few days, who has undoubtedly so many good points in his character, that such a boy had turned out to be a thief."

"He isn't. It isn't true. Oh, Mr Willoughby, don't believe that he did it!"

"I try to do so, Smith; and I hope that grounds will be shown me to be convinced of his innocence. But I can't conceal from myself that the suspicion against him is very strong and supported by unquestionable facts. Of course, in such a matter we must be governed by evidence rather than by our mere sympathies and ideas of a person's character. But it is certainly a strong point in Kennedy's favour that those who know him best seem to stand by him."

"All his friends know he couldn't have done such a thing. Do let me go to him, sir."

"No, Smith," said Mr Willoughby, in a tone which showed he was unwilling and yet determined to refuse. "I should like you to be with him, but it would not be right. Mr Dalton is going to hold an investigation to-morrow, and, till this is over, he has desired me to keep Kennedy apart from you all. If a mistake has been made, you may be sure his innocence will come to light, and there is no one in the school who will not be glad of it."

So I was obliged to content myself with writing a note to George and asking the matron to give it to him :

"MY DEAR GEORGE,—They won't let me come to see you ; isn't it a shame ? Don't be afraid ; I know now who is the real thief, and I shall find him out. I am sure it is Abbing. I will come and see you if I can get a chance. Some of the fellows say it never could have been you. Anyhow, I will never believe it ; you may be sure of that.—Yours affectionately,

"R. S."

I felt relieved when I had sent off this letter. George would be cheered and would trust me to bring things right—at least he would know how zealous I was in his cause. If I had known that he had not received my message and at that moment was fretting himself over the thought that I, too, had deserted him, I should have gone to him, though a hundred-eyed and hundred-caned Cerberus of a master guarded the passage.

From Mrs Bramble I heard how he was. The matron was fond of George, though he had given her more trouble than perhaps any boy in the house ; and now she warmly took his part and declared that no one could persuade her to believe him guilty. From her I learned how he was low-spirited and restless, how his foot pained him severely, how leeches had been put on it, how he had borne them without a word, how he had asked for nothing but to be left to himself. Then I raged afresh in spirit against his accusers, and was only restrained by more prudent advisers from taking Abbing by the throat and charging him with the theft there and then.

The boys talked about nothing else all the evening, and I

thought about little else. And far into the night I lay sleepless, thinking how Harry Kennedy's brother, in pain and trouble, would be tossing in the little room above, and fretting his heart, over this unexpected and undeserved calamity.





## CHAPTER XXI.

### WHO DID IT?

**U**ST as if our excitement was not hot enough, the bellows were once more applied to it. As soon as Mrs Pearson heard what had been found out, she began to discover that she had lost two silver teaspoons and other articles of more or less value. The matter was becoming very serious. With bated breath we whispered among ourselves that a detective had been sent for. On her part, Mrs Pearson went into a violent state of indignation and raged terrible things against the criminal.

“I was sure there was a thief in the house, ever since these eggs of mine were taken. And how foolish it was not to think of Kennedy! Everybody knows that he is mad about birds’ eggs. That must have led him on to teaspoons; and a boy who is not afraid to steal teaspoons won’t stick at a few eggs. I hope Mr Willoughby will put a stop to this bird-nesting for the future. I always thought it was a bad thing. It spoils the boys’ clothes and teaches them to steal.”

“I am sure George Kennedy would cut off his hand, Mrs

Pearson, before he would touch a thing of yours or anybody's," declared our matron, warmly.

"How can you say so, Mrs Branble? You always liked Kennedy, I know; but to my mind he was one of the most troublesome boys in the house. Always whistling and howling and galloping about; never looking like a gentleman. It was positively disgusting to see how untidy he was, and he never came into my parlour but I had to get Jane to sweep away the marks of his dirty boots. I never thought him a nice boy, but I didn't suppose it would come to this."

The more Mrs Pearson thought and talked about it, the more she persuaded herself that George must be the thief; but quite an opposite effect was produced among the boys. Sheer surprise had taken possession of them when the accusation was first made, and in this mood they had held aloof from George and looked askance at him, and thus given him reason to suppose that he had suddenly become an object of aversion. But when they knew that he was lying in pain, surprise gave way to sympathy, and most of the fellows had only to think of whom they were accusing to pronounce that there must be some mistake. So next morning the tide of public feeling had set in strongly in his favour. It was in vain that Marshall heaped invectives on him, and Tom Cane detailed the proofs of George's guilt.

"George Kennedy! Nonsense!" was felt by those who knew him to be the most unanswerable of arguments. Even Tom Cane began to doubt, though he professed to stick to his original opinion.

"The more I think of it, Lessing, it seems more clear that it *must* have been Kennedy."

"And the more I think of it, Caius, it seems more clear that it *couldn't* have been Kennedy."



"Well ——" and Cane scratched his head; and seeing that he wavered, Lessing and I plied him with arguments, and finally communicated to him the suspicion that I had begun to entertain.

"Abbing! Well, nobody would be so much astonished if he turned out to be the thief. You know I suspected him before, but there was no evidence. I was never able to bring it home to him. He has managed it very cunningly, if it was Abbing."

"I don't believe it was Abbing myself," said Lessing. "The fellow who stole these things and tried to put the blame on Kennedy must have been a very high style of scoundrel. I don't think Abbing has either courage or cunning enough to play a game like this. But it's worth while to keep an eye on him."

"Abbing!" sneered Marshall, when he heard this new suggestion. "Not a bit of him. Abbing would be afraid to steal anything. Now, that Kennedy, confound him, is not a muff, though he is not such an angel as all you fellows think him. Of course it was Kennedy."

But I stuck to my idea, and in the course of the morning succeeded in talking over Cane to such an extent that he volunteered to assist me in keeping a watch over the movements of Abbing.

"Not that anything will come of it, but it's as well to neglect no clue," he said, looking as great and important as ever did Bow Street Runner, or more mysterious emissary from Scotland Yard.

"Do help me, Cane. I want some fellow who understands that sort of thing.

"Well, I'll do what I can," said Caius, highly pleased at being requested to exercise his talents.

We were talking thus in the great schoolroom, just before morning school, when enter to us Abbing with a book in his hand. He ran hurriedly up to Phillips' desk, opened it, shoved the book in, and went off again without taking any notice of us. All this he did in the most natural manner in the world ; but to my jaundiced eyes it seemed very suspicious, and, as soon as Abbing was gone, I rushed up to Phillips' desk and eagerly took out the book he had placed there—a Roman History ; it was lying on the top of the others, and easily to be recognised by its red edges. But I was somewhat disappointed to find on the first page of it the name, "Jemima Anne Phillips," under a very uncomplimentary picture of the owner. This was no evidence, though I suggested that he might have stolen the book from Phillips, and put it back from fear.

"Of course Phillips lent it him," was Cane's opinion, however. "Why, he saw us both looking at him, and he would not have dared to put the book in the desk if it wasn't all right."

But still I was not satisfied, and when we went into the playground at the quarter, I sought out Phillips and asked him—

"Do you know where your Roman History is?"

"No—why?—oh, stop!—I remember now. I lent it to Abbing. Do you want it?"

"Never mind," said I, turning away, and then Phillips stopped me.

"Smith, I want to say something to you."

"What's the matter?" I replied, not noticing the tone in which he spoke, for my head was running on Abbing and the best means of detecting him.

"I want to tell you—" began Phillips, but he had scarcely opened his mouth when Dunnismore ran up, with a laugh on his face.

"Come here, Phillips, I wish to speak to you. I must tell you something, old fellow. Do come for a minute," and he took Phillips' arm.

Jemima allowed himself to be led away, leaving me not much concerned at losing the communication that he had been about to make to me. I was taken up by a plan which had just occurred to my mind, and in which I presently got Balbus to assist me. We descended to the narrow passage which has already been mentioned as leading from the cloisters to Mr Williamson's room, and serving his boys as a temporary asylum for their books and other belongings. Here we ensconced ourselves in a dark recess behind the open door giving egress into the playground, and waited to see if any one came to meddle with the books that lay scattered about upon a narrow shelf running the whole length of the passage. Balbus was tickled with the idea that we should presently be able to pop out upon the thief who had caused so much mystery, but I was obliged to confess to myself that there was not much chance of our discovering anything. If I could only have been there yesterday!

We saw nothing except a forlorn mouse which ventured to cross before our faces, and which Balbus was only restrained from chasing by the seriousness of the occasion; but from within the room was audible Mr Williamson's voice in its highest and angriest tones. This would have been not so entertaining if we had been among his proper audience, but we smiled when we heard him performing to the lower fourth form.

"You big, blundering, blockheaded boobies!" he was bellowing, loud enough to be heard in the Minster. "How long do you think I will put up with this abominable idleness and stupidity? I declare a drove of decent donkeys would do their repetition better than you. I am perfectly certain a row of sticks with turnips on the top would make a more respectable set of boys. I tell you I will *not* have it. Sit down, Wood; how dare you stir till I give you leave! Every boy in this class will stop in till this lesson is learned thoroughly well—thoroughly well; do you hear me? I have put up with this too long—far too long! But I must put a stop to it, and I tell you that once and for all. What do you mean, Johnson, by this disgraceful exhibition?"

An indistinct mumbling was heard in reply, and then came another roar.

"Tried to learn it, indeed! Tried! a nice kind of trying. I'll show you, sir, the proper way to try. Not an inch shall you try to stir from this room till you have tried to more purpose. I have tried to show you that you can't make a fool of me in this way. I am weary of talking to you, and trying to make you try in earnest, and I really shall get seriously angry if there is not some improvement in the work of this form. Every one of you shall stop in, I say, and I have a good mind to give you an imposition that will take you all your play time for a week. Tried, indeed! No play for blockheads that won't work."

While old Paddy within was raging thus, there happened without something which led us to hope we were going to make a discovery. Two small day-boys appeared in the passage, and looked about them, and whispered, and altogether behaved mysteriously. I nudged Balbus, and we pricked up our ears. What was our excitement to see these

cubs examine the little bundles of books and select the largest! I was about to rush out on them, but, just in time to prevent me from making a fool of myself, I saw that their intentions were not as felonious as I had supposed them to be. The mischievous young cubs, with many chuckles, fastened the book-strap over Mr Williamson's door in such a manner that the books would come down on the head of the first boy who should come out, as soon as it was opened. Then they ran away, not a moment too soon, for a heavy step was heard, and out came Mr Williamson, and down came the books, narrowly missing his head.

"How dare you?" he cried, seeing us peeping from behind the opposite door and supposing that this was a trick of ours; then, of course, we came out and protested our innocence.

"Not a single word! Didn't I see you? Answer me this moment; weren't you sneaking behind that door?"

"Please, sir, we didn't—"

"How dare you contradict me? I declare I shall make an example of you. It is not to be tolerated that a master is to be treated in this manner. Do you think that I believe your story? Do you think you can deceive me as well as insult me? If so, let me tell you that you are lamentably mistaken—remarkably mistaken. You shall hear of this, both of you, and I will answer for it that it will be the last time you undertake to be impertinent to me."

And the master swept by like a hurricane, leaving us somewhat discomposed but not much alarmed, for we knew that old Paddy would soon cool down, and that then we should have no difficulty in getting him to listen to reason. The result of this adventure was, however, con-

siderably to discourage my exertions as an amateur detective, and it was only after a suggestion from Cane that I resumed them at twelve o'clock.

"Look here," said he, "Abbing has just gone down town. It would do no harm if we followed him and saw what he was up to. I'm sure I should like to be able to get Kennedy out of this mess, and I shouldn't be over and above sorry if I found it was Abbing."

So we set out in pursuit of Abbing, who, all unconscious that he was being dogged, made his way leisurely through the streets, loafing about before various shop windows, and causing us much perplexity by the random way in which he seemed to direct his steps.

"Perhaps he is dodging and making for some hole, like a sly fox that he is," guessed Cane; but after wandering about for half-an-hour, Abbing had entered no door but that of a green-grocer's shop, whence he emerged with his pocket full of cherries, and regaled himself therewith as he leisurely proceeded on his way. Next he stopped at a Punch-and-Judy show, and looked on with approval till the hat began to be handed round, when he seemed to be suddenly struck by the undignified nature of this amusement and lounged off. After that he patronised a fortuitous dog fight, from which he seemed to derive the satisfaction and delight that can only be enjoyed by an innocent mind. And when he turned round and perceived us close at hand, he hailed us in such a confident way that we could not but feel our suspicions shaken. So we gave up following him and went home.

Just as we were arriving at the schoolhouse, we again saw Abbing coming up by another way, and as he came in sight he was unmistakably popping a book under his

jacket. So I ran to meet him and abruptly demanded to be allowed to look at it.

"'Tisn't any business of yours," said Abbing.

"But it is. Show it me this moment, Abbing, or I'll make you. After all that has been said about books I have a right to see what tricks you are up to."

"Good gracious! You don't think I stole these books?" said Abbing, looking rather alarmed, and then he brought out from under his jacket the object of my fresh suspicion.

It was a little cheap yellow-covered story book, of a kind which were prohibited in the Schoolhouse. Nothing was more likely than that Abbing should buy such a book, and should smuggle it in under his jacket. I found myself foiled once more, and Cane reproached me for my hastiness.

"Why, you stupid, if he had anything to do with it we ought not to have shown him that we had any suspicions. You should have waited and watched him."

This was true enough, and I felt disgusted with myself and tired of the whole affair. I had at first been highly excited about it, and now a reaction was setting in. My suspicions all turned out to be empty ones; I could find out nothing. They wouldn't let me go to George. By this time he had plenty of other champions. Perhaps that discouraged me as much as anything else. I had forgotten to do the imposition which had been given me the day before, and now I had to do it doubled. Altogether I was in low spirits.

But I was roused to make another effort on George's behalf, when after dinner somebody cried out, "Here's Dalton coming!" and running to the windows we saw the head master and Mr Williamson walking up to Mrs Pear-

son's door. Of course we knew what they had come about, and, gathering in knots in the playground and schoolroom, began to speculate upon what decision the masters would arrive at. Then I took courage and cried out—

“It's a shame, I say. We know it couldn't have been Kennedy; and I think the fellows ought to tell Mr Dalton so.”

“Hear! hear!” cried Lessing; and many of the others who were present seemed to agree with me. But Marshall was not willing to change his opinion.

“Stuff and nonsense! Why should we interfere? We do think it was Kennedy; those of us who don't believe him to be such a good boy as he pretends to be, at least.”

“He doesn't pretend to be a good boy. You don't like him, that's it.”

“You have no business to say that, Smith,” answered Tom Cane, in his capacity of counsel for the prosecution. “I'm sure nobody wants to think Kennedy guilty; but after investigating and weighing the evidence, we can't help thinking that it looks uncommonly like it. At all events you have no proof on his side.”

“We have this proof, that we have been at school with him for years, and know that he never did anything mean or dishonest before.”

“Well, we must leave it to the masters now that they have taken it up.”

There was a pause which was broken by Dunnismore volunteering his opinion—

“After all, I don't think Kennedy did it.”

“Nobody asked you,” growled Marshall. “Small boys should be seen and not heard.”

Master Dunnismore was a little out of favour.



the big fellows had petted him till he forgot the respect due to their rank, and now his friend Marshall occasionally undertook to snub him. So he "shut up," as the expressive schoolboy phrase has it, and just then came up to us Abbing, looking mysterious. I was thinking whether I should not accuse him there and then and try to frighten him into a confession, when he put in his word—

"I say, you fellows, I believe Phillips has had something to do with this business. I have been watching him all day, and I'm sure there's something wrong with him. He has been moping about by himself and looking quite miserable."

"Phillips and you are both idiots!" declared Marshall. "Kennedy would never have taken such a muff into his confidence."

"I think he has the toothache," said Dunnismore.

"Or perhaps he has been writing some of his humbugging poetry. He always looks sentimental over it."

"No, but I'll tell you a thing," persisted Abbing. "I remember that day when Williamson lost the half-sovereign, Phillips didn't bathe like the rest of us. He was sitting on the bank looking on, and I think he said that the doctor wouldn't let him bathe. You remember, Dunnismore, for you didn't bathe either."

"Me? No! I think you are mistaken. I don't remember anything about it. I did bathe that afternoon."

"I don't think you did, and I am sure Jemima didn't, for I remember chaffing him. He was sitting on the bank beside our clothes the whole time."

"He was afraid of Mrs Pearson sending him to bed for crushing his collar," sneered Marshall; but others thought this suggestion worth catching at.

"Where is Phillips?" asked Ellis.

"In his study, I believe."

"Go and fetch him, some fellow."

"Tell him the prefects want to speak to him this moment," cried Marshall.

Dunnismore and I both volunteered to perform this mission, but I got the start, and in a minute or two returned with Phillips looking very ill at ease. The fellows crowded round to see what would happen; and before a word had been said Phillips' frightened face told a tale.

"Now, Jemima, listen to us and don't tell any lies, or we'll half murder you. Do you know anything about these books?"

Phillips looked at Dunnismore and burst into tears.





## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE SICK ROOM.

**A**L this time poor George was suffering more than stolid natures could imagine. He did not know that the boys had been forbidden to go to him, and put the worst construction on their keeping away. Even his greatest friends, he thought bitterly, had come to suppose him guilty; for Mrs Bramblé forgot to give him my note for several hours, and thus unconsciously added to his troubles.

Late at night Mrs Bramble remembered the note, and sent it up to Kennedy by one of the servants. But he had no light, and my friendly attention was of very questionable service to him; for, though he was glad to get a message from me, his anxiety to know what it was kept him from sleeping half the night. He turned the paper in all directions and held it to the failing light, but not a word could he make out. He groped on the table and felt in his pockets again and again for matches, but in vain. He searched the pocket of his jacket hanging at the bedside; there was one match there, he knew, and after some trouble

he found it. He struck it on the wall, and carefully tried to shade the flame with his hands ; but it flickered a single moment and went out. Provoking ! He heard footsteps in one of the adjacent rooms and called out. No one came to him, however, and he was left alone for the night with no means of reading the note the contents of which he was so anxious to learn. It was most annoying, and whereas he had just before been inclined to sleep, he now worried himself into a state of uneasy wakefulness.

Everybody knows that sleep is the truest friend of the sorrowful. Has any poet ever noticed that the mere fact of getting into bed is often a real comfort in trouble. You creep trustfully into this welcome shelter, and nestle in the blankets, and wrap yourself from all the cold evils of life, and cover your ears against the raging and the slanders of men, and feel that you are inhabiting a little universe where you rule supreme with no duty or task but to cuddle your own injured self, and that the great cruel world without has no power to harm you. But this comfort is not granted always, or to all. We know what it is that sits behind the horseman and climbs up the side of the clipper-built yacht ; into the feather bed, also, does grim care ascend, especially on a hot night in a close room, when you are very anxious to read something and can't. Mrs Bramble's medicinal ideas were of the old school ; she believed in warm soft beds, and closed windows, and such like preventatives against catching cold ; and, with the kindest intentions, she had left her patient to swelter uncomfortably under a pile of blankets more suited for December. This, and the pain of his ankle, added to the agitation with which he twisted my scrap of paper in his hand and longed for light.

Hour after hour George turned restlessly from side to side, wondering what I had to tell him, hoping for good news, but expecting the worst, till at length he had worked himself into a perfect fever of excitement.

Do you know the misery of some summer nights when, in full health and without a care on your mind, you roll and toss, and clench your fists, and dig your head into the pillows, and raise it up, and draw long breaths of choking air, and throw off the blankets one moment, and wrap them tightly round you the next, and try to fix your mind now on something, then on nothing, and think of cool groves and fountains as of a cruel mockery, and desire to knock your head against the wall, to leap up and bathe your moist limbs in ice, to let out the blood that is thumping through your arteries, and mutter and groan, and cry out against this invisible fiend who is tormenting you, and feel that no price were too great to pay for the cheapest of nature's blessings—sleep? If you can imagine suffering of this kind, increased by bodily pain and the sense of lying helpless under a cruel injury, surely you will sympathise with George Kennedy, and wish you could have put an end to half his present anxiety by conveying to him one single wax vesta and an inch of the vilest dip that ever guttered in a garret.

Before the grey dawn had glimmered into the room, George had at length fallen into a troubled and fitful doze, in which he remained for several hours, and from which he awoke wearied rather than refreshed. He read my note at length, but it did not do much towards cheering him. He felt utterly beaten down and hopeless. His breakfast was sent away almost untasted; he did not say a word to the servant who brought it. The day before he would have

been eager to learn if anything had been found out or decided about the thefts, but now the fight was all taken out of him. If they choose to believe him guilty, they might ; he had no heart to be indignant ; his mind was filled with a torpid sullenness that was very unlike the usual energy and warmth of his disposition. While he was in this state, Mr Willoughby came to see him, and again these two misunderstood each other. No very shrewd student of human nature at any time, the master will not be wondered at if he now mistook the boy's dejection for a sign of guilt ; and George failed to perceive the earnest kindness that was ready to gush out from beneath the reserved manner which Mr Willoughby felt himself bound to assume towards one charged upon grave suspicion with such a serious offence. His feelings of sympathy and trustfulness were so strong, that he had taught himself to shut his ears to them and to act with painful conscientiousness upon what seemed the hard facts of such a question. George understood from his tone that Mr Willoughby felt bound to believe him guilty ; he did not understand that the master had for hours been made sleepless by trying to hope that he might be innocent.

And when George turned his face to the wall, and gave short, sullen answers to Mr Willoughby's inquiries, he went away sad at heart, vexed to think that he had been deceived in this boy whom he had been coming to know and like, and pondering how he might best appeal to those fragments of nobler feeling which he knew that George possessed.

A kindly word spoken the night before might have brought about full confidence and sympathy between these two ; but, as on their first acquaintance, they misunderstood each other.

Then came Mrs Bramble, cheerful, neat-handed, motherly, smoothing his disordered bed, bathing his ankle, expressing her confidence in his innocence, bringing friendly messages from more than one of the boys, likewise some bread and marmalade from her own private stores, and in other ways introducing little rays of comfort into the sick-room of a patient, which was also the cell of a prisoner. Under the influence of her ministrations, George brightened up a little, and, at her suggestion, he relieved his feelings by writing a long letter home to acquaint his mother with what had happened. He did not think of defending himself; he was sure at home they would know the charge to be false, whatever might be thought at Whitminster. This letter being written—the day before he had only tried to write one—he gave it to Mrs Bramble to send out in time for the afternoon post, and felt that he had demanded sympathy and assistance which were sure not to fail him.

And, perhaps, thinking of these dear ones at home, George thought of the lessons he had learned there, and remembered in his trouble what boys and men, proud in health and mirth, too often forget, that there is One to whom we never need look in vain for comfort and help in time of need. And perhaps with some familiar prayer made sacred by his mother's kisses, there went up one supplication that He who can do all things would make his innocence to be seen and give him strength to bear the trial through which he was passing. Perhaps George himself scarcely could put his prayer into words, yet in his heart he believed that God would do right, and that thought could not but sustain him.

But of this I will speak no further; not every pen has power to paint all the shades of life. And who can interpret

and write down the faint aspirations of an honest young heart that begins to see dimly how this world is more than a mere round of childish joys and sorrows, and tasks and sports, and failures that are forgotten, and successes that are in vain? This, at least, we may know, that many a school-boy prayer, which trembled to clothe itself in the humblest words, has taken angels' wings and flown straight to heaven, while more confident supplications were still struggling with the load of form and verbiage that held them down to earth.

Towards the middle of the day Kennedy fell asleep, and was awakened by Mrs Pearson standing at his bedside with a tray in her hands.

"I have brought your dinner," she said; and George was not yet wide enough awake to understand the stiffness of her tone.

"Oh, thank you, ma'am," he replied, warmly.

Mrs Pearson went on arranging the tray on his bed and said nothing; then George remembered and understood, and a sudden impulse moved him to cry out—

"Mrs Pearson, surely *you* don't think that I did this."

"I hope not. But I would rather not talk about it, Kennedy. Mr Dalton is in the house just now, and as soon as you have finished your dinner he is coming to speak to you."

With this she left the room, and though she had spoken not unkindly, her evident meaning took away all George's appetite. Nearly every one believed him guilty. It was hard to bear.

And now for the first time George began to feel afraid. The astonishment and indignation with which he had heard the charge made against him had left no place for fear, even



if he had been capable of it when in full health and spirits. Then he had felt angry and defiant; these feelings had wearied themselves out into sullen despair; pain and sleeplessness had reduced his sharp anger to a sort of listless indifference. Since writing home he had been in a calmer frame of mind, till Mrs Pearson's manner had again stung him into agitation. Then he found that all this suffering had weakened him, and, conscious though he was of innocence, he could not help looking forward with some anxiety to his interview with the head-master.

Not a morsel could he eat—he pushed away the tray upon which good-hearted Mrs Bramble had neatly arranged such savoury meat as a school kitchen can furnish forth. He sat up in bed, and twisted his pocket handkerchief into the shape of a rabbit, and thought over what he should say to Mr Dalton, and wondered if any new discovery had been made, and resolved not to be afraid, nor to show anything that might look like a sign of guilt, and felt that he couldn't help doing so, and wished that the interview was all over, and then that it was not at hand, and then that it might begin at once, and listened eagerly for every sound, and his heart fluttered when a footstep came near the door.

No! it was only a servant going along the passage. But then came other voices and louder steps, and poor George made a great effort to keep cool and to face the coming ordeal like a man, and the door was opened—and in rushed a mob of his friends with eager joy and congratulation written on their faces.

“Hurrah! It's all right, Kennedy! I'm so glad. What a shame! We are awfully sorry, old fellow. Isn't it a good thing that it is all found out at length? Have they told you? I never heard of such a thing in all my life.”

•

"What is it?—Have you found him out?" stammered George, bewildered by the babel that rose around him.

"It's all right. You didn't steal the books," explained Balbus.

"Of course. He knows that. But you would never have thought, Kennedy——"

"It's the queerest thing——"

"I never knew such a cool fellow."

"And such a favourite with Mrs P. ! I say, won't she just weep over her darling good little boy?"

"Abbing is not a favourite," said George, puzzled.

"No—I don't mean Abbing ; though it's a good thing he told us about Jemima, and——"

"Why?—what do you say? Has Phillips been the fellow——"

"No, but he——"

"It was fearfully low of him."

"It wasn't he who stole the things, but——"

"It's sure to turn out that he did it."

"Anyhow he can prove it wasn't you."

"I don't know what you mean," said George, looking from one to another. "What have you found out, Bob?"

"Why, that Dunnismore stole the things."

"Dunnismore !"

"Yes ! He's a——"

My feelings were too strong for utterance, but half-a-dozen voices filled up the sentence.

"Blackguard !" "Low sneak !" "Little brute !" "Most awful cad !"

"You are going too fast," said Tom Cane, who arrived just then, and pushed his way through the crowd with the

air of an incipient beadle. "It isn't proved that Dunnismore is the thief."

"No," said Lessing, "but after we have kicked him out of the school we can easily prove it."

"We mustn't be in a hurry," pronounced the judicial Cane. "I always thought it might be Dunnismore, but we know nothing for certain."

"Don't tell crams, Cane. Nobody ever suspected Dunnismore, somehow or other, and now it turns out to be him as plain as pudding."

"I'll tell you all about it, Kennedy," began Cane. "I was sure it couldn't be you, and I have been doing all I could to find out the real thief. Well, I believe we have got him at length. It's a queer story, and I don't quite know where to begin."

"Begin at the beginning," suggested Lessing. "And the beginning is that Jemima saw Dunnismore carefully packing up Grey's book in your strap."

"But there is something before that," said Cane. "I wish you would shut up, Lessing, and let me explain clearly. When these two stole the eggs they agreed not to tell."

"You remember the row Mrs Pearson made about some eggs?"

"And when he thought the fellows would find out, you know, he thought he would put one of the books among yours, and then they would think it was you."

"Then he said he would tell if he told, and he wanted to, but he didn't like to, because he frightened him."

"And Phillips was in a funk and didn't know what to do," said somebody else, taking up the tangled thread of the narrative.

"I say, old fellow, everybody is so glad it's all right,"

cried out a new comer. "The masters have got hold of Dunnismore just now, and they are pumping the truth out of him."

"They'll have to pump out a jolly lot of lies first."

"Well, some of the fellows saw that Phillips knew something about it," continued Cane, "and they told me, and I got Jemima and made him confess."

"You should have seen how Dunnismore looked at him. I never saw a fellow look so like a tiger-cat."

"And such a sugar-faced, good little boy, too. Why, they say Mother Pearson kisses him and brushes his hair to go to church."

"You should have seen how he tried to deny it all. But the fellows saw that Phillips was telling the truth, and they hauled them both off to the masters."

"And there was such a row! Oh, Kennedy, you ought to have heard Dalton sitting on Dunnismore."

"He was squashed quite flat," declared Lessing. "But he had a whole string of things to say for himself. His tongue went like a dog's tail at feeding time. Then they saw that he was lying hard and fast, and at length he began to cry, and I believe it's all up with him, though they haven't got to the bottom of it yet."

"And they turned us all out. Wasn't that a cool trick?"

"And I must turn you all out," cried Mrs Bramble from the doorway. "It's what I call a cool trick to come up here without leave, messing my nice clean room, and disturbing Kennedy with all this noise. Mr Willoughby is coming presently, so you had better scamper off."

"Yes, you fellows," said Cane. "I wish you would go away, and then one would have a chance of telling Kennedy what has happened."

Then somebody announced the approach of no less a person than the head-master, and most of the boys moved off. But the room was never empty. Rules were set at defiance, and almost everybody came to see George and congratulate him ; not only the boys but the masters, and Mrs Pearson, and the matron and the servants. He must have seen how much of a favourite he was, for, as soon as an excuse could be found, everybody was eager to proclaim his innocence.

As for me, I was simply wild with excitement, and could do nothing but look at George and say, " Oh, I'm so glad !"

Among us we managed to explain to him how it all came about, and how, at all events, there was no evidence against him, but the gravest suspicion directed in a new and unexpected quarter. At length people grew tired of talking, and most of George's visitors went about their own business, and Mr Willoughby and I found ourselves alone with him. And then suddenly he burst into tears. The reaction had been too much for him.

"Come, Kennedy, cheer up. I am sure you have suffered a great deal, but think how much worse it would have been if you were guilty. You must see how glad we all are to find that our suspicions were unfounded. I am sure I am very sorry indeed for having helped to cause you pain, and it will be a lesson to me to be more careful for the future. I don't know how I persuaded myself that you were the thief, and yet, I assure you, it cost me a good deal to think so."

"Never mind, sir," said George, trying to regain his composure. "It wasn't your fault. You couldn't help thinking it was me. Nobody was to blame. It was all the luck. Anyhow, it's all right now."

"Marshall asked me," added I, "to tell you that he was very sorry for having accused you."

Thus I attempted to contribute my mite of consolation, but the effect of this message was not soothing.

"Marshall!" said George firing up. "Why doesn't he come himself, if he's sorry?"

"Oh, I don't know. He doesn't like to."

"I dare say he doesn't. Precious sorry he is! I should like to tell him what I think of him," cried George, and then stopped, rebuked by a look from Mr Willoughby.

"Ah, Kennedy, this isn't right," said the master. "You should try to overcome such feelings towards those who have accused you. You were talking about 'luck' just now. Think rather that God has sent this trial for your good, as a lesson, perhaps, to a proud and angry spirit too ready to resent an injury. 'Forgive us our trespasses—'"

Mr Willoughby paused, and there was an awkward silence, such as often follows the introduction of serious talk among schoolboys. Then George began to say something, and stopped at the first word—

"Dunnismore—"

"'And lead *us* not into temptation,'" said Mr Willoughby very gently.





## CHAPTER XXIII.

### CONCLUSION.

**I**N a day or two George was able to hobble about, and when he came downstairs he found himself a very interesting character. Everybody seemed anxious to repair the injustice with which he had been treated. The boys would have done anything for him; he had become twice as great a favourite with them as before. No one professed now to have believed him guilty; everyone had known it would come all right, and pressed forward to congratulate the hero of the hour. Mr Willoughby asked George to sit in his room till he was quite recovered; Mrs Bramble gave him the same invitation; and, while he was hesitating between the greater honour of the one and the greater comfort of the other, Mrs Pearson seized on him, dragged him off to her parlour, and regaled him with such dainties as had hitherto been reserved for nice little boys who brushed their hair and didn't dirty their boots. And of all such expressions of sympathy, not the least honest was that of Balbus, who came up to George and shook his hand heartily and whispered—

“I say, I'll give you my owl, if you like.”

Knowing how eagerly George had looked forward to this triumph of injured innocence, one might have expected that his head would be turned by it. But it was not so. The congratulations of his schoolfellows he received in an awkward way, which made them think that he was resenting their suspicions; and when they tried to propitiate him, he became only more shy and reserved. Except to one or two of his greatest friends, he was unwilling to talk about the matter, and utterly refused to be petted by Mrs Pearson. He begged to be allowed to go to school; and, as he was still unable to walk far, our mistress drove him down in her own pony carriage. When he entered the schoolroom, first one boy and then another began to cheer, and the masters did not frown, but smiled approvingly, and amid general applause George limped to his place, and hastened to hide his blushes behind the lid of his desk. And if my readers can read his mind, they will see that it was not any blameable feeling that made him hang his head in the hour of his triumph, though he had held it high enough in his adversity.

It was a grand sight to see his meeting with the bitterest of his accusers. Marshall kept away from the sick-room, but as soon as George made his appearance downstairs, he came forward and spoke out like a man—

“Kennedy, I’m glad you are all right again. I made a great mistake about that business, and I am very sorry for it.”

“All right, Marshall!” said George, cordially, and held out his hand. Thus Achilles and Agammemnon were reconciled, and remained very friendly—for a week.

To Phillips, who was having a hard enough time of it just then, George was scarcely so cordial. It was not from resentment, I believe, but because he did not know how to treat Phillips under the circumstances; and Phillips, on his



part, kept aloof. He was thoroughly ashamed of himself, and had not the courage to tell George how sorry he was for the share he had taken in his misfortune ; but he opened his heart to me—

“ I wish you knew how miserable I was, and how that fellow frightened me. One minute I thought of going straight to Mrs Pearson and telling her ; then I was afraid. I thought Kennedy would get off some other way. You see, he hadn't been accused regularly. Surely you don't think I could have let him be expelled? I was only waiting for a chance to come out with it all, but that Dunnismore never left me alone, and kept reminding me —— Well, I'm glad it is all out now. I would rather have any punishment than feel myself such a brute. I shall never let myself get into such a scrape again.”

Poor Phillips ! He was not expelled, as he somewhat unnecessarily feared he should have been, but he was punished by a long imposition and confinement to bounds for the rest of the term ; and this was nothing compared with the contempt showed for him by the other boys, who were thus able to prove that they would never have acted in such a cowardly manner. Their disapproval almost went further. It was proposed by more than one sound moralist that Miss Jemima's tender skin should be tanned as an example and a pastime, and willing executioners were not wanting. But some of the elder boys, who understood Phillips better and saw how sincere and painful was his self-reproach, interfered in his favour. And, luckily for him, the whole tide of public indignation had set in so strong against Dunnismore, that its force was diverted from the less flagrant offender.

No one had thought of accusing Dunnismore before, but

the accusation once made, nobody thought of disbelieving it. When Phillips charged him publicly with concealing the book among Kennedy's, he flatly contradicted him and tried to brazen it out. But nobody who saw the faces of the two boys doubted which of them was telling the truth. Phillips' distress was evidently honest. Dunnismore over-acted his part; and as his courage began to fail he betrayed himself still more manifestly. With pale face and quivering lip he was driven, denying, from lie to lie; and when he was brought before the masters he broke down and confessed this much, that he had slipped the book into Kennedy's strap. That he had stolen anything he still denied, however, and there was really no positive evidence against him.

But his schoolfellows had no doubt. As soon as they had got over the surprise of the discovery, they settled in their own minds that Dunnismore was the thief who had been troubling them so long, and wondered that they had not found him out before. Now, at all events, they were minded to act vigorously and make up for lost time. So, while the masters were still puzzling over the case, the boys had pronounced sentence.

Dunnismore did not appear among them till prayer time. Afterwards he hung back and seemed sorely unwilling to go upstairs to his room; and with reason, for, as soon as he showed himself on the landing, he was seized by a dozen rough hands and dragged into the largest dormitory, close at hand, where he found almost all the boarders assembled.

A hint from the matron had prepared Mr Willoughby for something of this sort, and when presently he heard loud screams and entreaties, he knew what was going on, and ran upstairs just in time to rescue Dunnismore from his tor-

mentors, before they had done him any great harm, but not before they had frightened him out of his wits.

"Oh, don't leave me, Mr Willoughby!" he sobbed out, as the master led him to the matron's room. "Don't let them at me. They will kill me—the brutes!"

"I dare say Mrs Bramble will allow you to stay here for the present. I don't wish to let the boys annoy you, but if you complain of their harshness, you must remember that you have been trying to get another boy into the same trouble as you are now in."

"Indeed, you haven't much to complain of," declared Mrs Bramble, looking quite fierce behind her spectacles.

"I didn't mean to—I didn't think what I was doing. I was so frightened when I heard that the fellows were trying to find out—I didn't think anybody would accuse Kennedy, I really didn't. I was afraid they would catch me with the book."

"Then you confess that you had taken it?" and Dunnismore did not answer except by tears.

"Dunnismore, by your own account it is evident that you have behaved very ill. Let me beg of you to tell the whole truth—to hide nothing. It will be best in the end."

"Well, sir, I will tell you the whole truth. I put the book among Kennedy's, sir, because I had a spite against him; but that's all, upon my honour, sir, it is. I found it lying in the playground. I didn't take anything else, sir; I didn't, indeed. I am telling you the truth now, sir. I knew it was wrong not to tell it before, and I am very sorry, sir."

"Like enough," said Mrs Bramble, drily. "You'll be sorrier for what you have done before it's all over."

"I fear you are not telling the truth yet, my boy. You

have contradicted yourself in the last five minutes. It is both wrong and foolish; everything will be discovered sooner or later; you cannot hope to deceive us by falsehoods, and still less, Dunnismore, can you deceive God."

Dunnismore seemed much affected. He buried his face in his hands and the master bent over him.

"If we repent and confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," said Mr Willoughby with trembling voice, and Dunnismore sobbed out—

"I know, sir. I know I have done very wrong, and I must pray for forgiveness, but I have told you the whole truth. I didn't steal the money; I only took one book in fun. I hope I shall never be so wicked again."

"I am glad to see you look at what you have done in a proper light, and you may be sure, Dunnismore, that I will see justice done you. Only tell me everything frankly and freely."

"Hadn't you better leave it for to-night, Mr Willoughby. To-morrow he will not be so excited."

So spoke the matron, perceiving that Mr Willoughby's trustfulness was being too successfully appealed to; and he agreed that her advice was sound.

Next morning fresh evidence turned up against Dunnismore. Mr Willoughby came to know of his betting transactions, and this weighed very much in his disfavour in the eyes of the masters. Then there were awkward little stories of his dealings with small boys, as in the case of young Barton. Odd that Cane and the other clever fellows never thought of this, wasn't it? and odd that no one seemed to have remarked that Dunnismore did not receive any weekly allowance, and yet never seemed to want for money. It was now found out that at one confectioner's shop, not much

patronised by the rest of us, he had spent no less than three or four pounds since Christmas. This buying and eating of sweet things on the sly was alone enough to prove him guilty before a schoolboy jury.

The mistress of this shop remembered that Dunnismore had changed half-a-sovereign on the day before the Easter holidays—the day on which he sat watching the bathers, and Mr Williamson lost half-a-sovereign. She had a reason for remembering this so distinctly. The coin proved to be light weight, and, being a woman who took care both of the pence and of the pounds, she had laid it aside till she saw Dunnismore and could claim the difference. Styles, the second-hand bookseller, was also sent for. He at once declared that Dunnismore was the boy who had sold him the books; and then Dunnismore admitted that he had sold some books, but they were his own. He need not have taken the trouble to make this statement; for when one or two other boys were brought forward, old Styles blinked through his spectacles and identified each of them as his customer. So this evidence went for nothing.

I don't know if Dunnismore would have held out much longer in any case, but he broke down completely when an unexpected witness appeared against him. People in Whitminster, not having much else to talk about, were talking a good deal about this affair at the Grammar School. Among others Mr Luddington heard the story, and felt that he ought no longer to keep back a piece of information which he had already been in doubt about withholding. He went to Mr Dalton and told him that Dunnismore had been at Coleworth School and left it—expelled for theft.

Then Dunnismore gave up almost all hope, and confessed that he had stolen the half-sovereign from Mr Williamson.

The other thefts he still denied, but nobody believed him. And at the school we saw the Dean of Whitminster and one or two more of the governors being shown into the headmaster's room, and it was known that a solemn council was being held to deliberate on Dunnismore's fate, according to the laws and customs of Whitminster Grammar School. Their decision was not long in being given, and was whispered about in the playground before these dignitaries entered and took their seats in the great schoolroom. Then was led in the culprit, weeping and trembling, and the sentence of expulsion was pronounced in a most impressive manner.

Expelled! For a moment we forgot our wrath against Dunnismore and looked at him, as he was being led out by the school porter, with an interest that almost amounted to sympathy. It was the rarity of the punishment that caused it to impress us so much, for we did not understand its full severity. Schoolboys look little to the future. We thought only of that moment of unendurable shame. If we had reflected that the scars of such a punishment would last a lifetime, we should surely have given more pity to the unhappy boy who was being sent in lasting disgrace from among his companions, and would never again mingle in their merry sports or careless chat, nor in after life could take their friendly hands, nor smile to meet the once familiar faces. We understood not the force of the punishment, as we understood not the crime. If we had known what a burden his conscience was laying up for itself, and of what he deprived his after age by thus ruining the innocence of his boyhood!

This was on Saturday, and Dunnismore was allowed to stay till the Monday morning, while his parents were being

communicated with. "What will his mother say?" had been some boy's first comment; and no poet could have invented a truer stroke of pathos. But Dunnismore appeared not to think of this so much as other boys would have done. Though Mrs Bramble pressed him to write to his father or mother he refused, and spoke of going home with indifference. Poor lad! it was afterwards known that he had not been shielded from temptation by the blessing of a pure and loving home.

When his fate was settled he did not show much emotion. Mr Willoughby came several times to see him, and spoke most earnestly to him about the sin he had committed. Mrs Bramble was reserved, but not unkind; her sense of his wrong-doing she showed by reading to him from the Bible all the chapters about Achan, Gehazi, and other thieves and liars—her sympathy with his misfortune by giving him bread and jam from her cupboard. But neither of them could move him to anything more satisfactory than a little whimpering, and it was evident that his sorrow was more for having been found out than for having done wrong.

What a dreary day must have been that last Sunday which he spent at school—one of these days which are printed in capital letters in the history of a lifetime! I also remember it well. To more than one of us perhaps it was marked by a sermon which Mr Dalton preached in the Minster, specially addressing himself to those who were about to be confirmed. This sermon exists in print, and I am able to give an extract from it:

"Some of you may have read and understood the ancient fable of the choice of Hercules. You know that this is no empty tale, no idle fiction, but the story of a stern, alas!

too often a sorrowful truth that is enacted in the lives of all men, whether they be conscious of it or no. The same choice is offered to each of us—to be a hero in the work of the world, or to give himself up to idleness and cowardice and self-slavery. There is a point in our journey of life, when two roads lie more clearly open to us—one the way of evil that often seems pleasant, the other the way of good that often seems hard. At this point you are standing to-day, and I, among others, am in God's name urging upon you the importance of choosing the right way. . . .

"To us the path of life has been made plainer than to those who sought it in days of old. Philosophy bid them choose the good. Taught by One who spake as never man spake, we have learned that the first step towards true righteousness is to abhor evil. It was not easy for the treacherous heart of man to love virtue; it is hard to hate sin.

"Do we indeed hate sin? We may say to ourselves that we do. We hate sins which do not enchain our own hearts; we readily reprove wickedness seen in the lives of others. We sneer at the meanness of so and so, at the selfishness of such a one; we give thanks that this and that temptation beneath which our brother has fallen, is unknown to us. In the proverbial phrase, we carry a bag before us for the faults of our neighbours, but we put our own faults behind us out of sight, too often out of mind. We blind ourselves to our evil doings; when they are forced on our attention we forget them, excuse them, perhaps even glory in them. Little do we try to search our hearts, to drag forth our darling lusts and passions, and recognise them in their true light, hateful in the holy eye of God, censurable in the critical eye of our fellow men, who judge our weakness as we judge theirs.



“Ah, if we could but see ourselves as others see us!—if we could see ourselves as God sees us! Daily and hourly, by thought, word, and deed, by foolish wilfulness and stubborn disobedience, by selfish actions done for our pleasure to the hurt of others, by evil passions uncontrolled, by idle words spoken in jest, by duties neglected, by cowardly shrinking from the necessary conditions of our existence, do we vex the Holy Spirit of heaven and crucify afresh Him who has borne our sins, has been tried by our temptations, has suffered, the just for the unjust, that we might gain that salvation from our corrupt selves which we could never have gained by the works of our own hands. Holy men, whose eyes have been opened to this state of depravity, have thought a lifetime not too long to be devoted to seeking forgiveness of it and salvation from it. But most of us are unwilling to watch and pray for a single hour. We think so little of our vileness, so much of those rags of purity that still cling to the most rebellious members of that race which was once created after the image of God. We let these very virtues give proof of our sinfulness. We think that we stand firm, and take little heed lest we fall. But does the foot of our brother slip, is such a one taken in some snare from which by heaven’s mercy we have escaped, has he fallen into a danger which seems not to threaten us? Then we, we who hourly ought to pray for forgiveness, we who can trust to God’s grace alone that we be not led into temptation, we, who stand ever in such sore need of being delivered from evil—it is we, loaded with the burden of our own sins, who haste to cast the first stone at this more unfortunate sinner and to exult as if his downfall were indeed our victory.”

I looked at George and George looked at me, and we

both involuntarily looked at Dunnismore's place among the choristers, as did many others who had listened to Mr Dalton's words and understood them in the same way that we did, though I don't know if the preacher meant them to be so understood.

But Dunnismore was not in his place. All that dull, drizzling Sunday he remained in the matron's room ; and I dare say he was glad when we went to church and left him quite alone, for during the rest of the day he found himself the object of great curiosity on the part of his late companions, who kept popping in and out on one pretext or another, and returning to report how he looked. To some of the younger boys Dunnismore spoke, but they scarcely answered him, if at all, and turned hastily away in an unmistakable manner that would have stung deeply a prouder soul. Nor did he escape more pointed insults. More than one boy thought fit to exercise the muscles of his virtue by flinging a sneer or a sarcasm at this notorious evil-doer.

“ Don't leave that book on the table,” cried Abbing, with pretended alarm, glancing meaningly at Dunnismore as he crouched by the empty fireplace.

Abbing and Lessing had come to the matron's room to complain about a deficiency of starch in their worships' Sunday shirts, or that no pudding had been given them at dinner, or—who knows ? And even Lessing, easy, good-natured Lessing, entered into the joke and hurriedly snatched up his book, looking round as if in alarm, and replying to Abbing, “ Oh, I forgot ! ” Dunnismore said nothing, but a little frown might have been seen on his face.

Then came Marshall, who only looked into the room and said in a tone of the fiercest scorn—

"Cad !"

Dunnismore glanced at him appealingly, but his late patron strode away without deigning another word.

Next, Mrs Pearson happened to seek the matron in her room. And while she stood there talking to Mrs Bramble about one of the little boys who was ill from eating unripe fruit, she took not the slightest notice of Dunnismore, and left the room without saying a single word to him. Then the tears which had gathered in his eyes at Marshall's harshness began to roll down his cheeks. But he did not know that in her own room Mrs Pearson, too, had been shedding bitter tears over the misery of her favourite, to whom she durst not trust herself to speak. So Dunnismore, forsaken by all his friends, sat mournfully silent by the fireplace. And Mrs Bramble gave him a lecture on the consequences of doing wrong, and then comforted him with a slice of cake.

Last of all came George Kennedy. When Dunnismore saw him he turned his face to the wall, but George came up to him and sat down and said—

"Isn't it very hot to-night, Dunnismore?"

"Yes," said Dunnismore doubtfully, for he could scarcely believe his ears; but George went on with one or two remarks of the same kind.

Just then I happened to come in to ask Mrs Bramble to mend my gloves, and when I saw these two chatting together I could scarcely believe my eyes. I was going to withdraw, but George called out to me, and I sat down with them.

The conversation was not a lively one. I took very little part in it, for I could not think what to say. Dunnismore may—no, he *must*—have been grateful for this kindness on the part of the boy whom he tried to injure; but he did

not show it, fidgeting uneasily on his seat and speaking in monosyllables. It was George who kept up the talk, and though he must have found it a hard task, he managed pretty well, making no great display of friendliness, but not saying a word that might wound Dunnismore's feelings. This is what it is to be a gentleman. I wondered how he could do it, he who was so blunt and downright in his speech; and never had I admired him more.

After a time Dunnismore thawed a little, and we were all beginning to be on more easy terms, when the supper bell rang, and George and I got up and were about to shake hands with our schoolfellow, who was to go away early next morning. But Mrs Bramble invited us to stay, and sent to ask Mr Willoughby if we might have supper with her.

We stayed, but I don't think any of us enjoyed that meal much. Dunnismore had begun to make a sort of awkward apology to George for his conduct, and this not only broke down but almost put a stop to further talk. We were all glad when it was time to go to bed. Before we went upstairs, Mrs Bramble read prayers with us. And as we took our part with a feeling of solemnity that is not always found in schoolboy devotions, a strange thrill of memory rang through my heart. I could have believed it was Harry Kennedy's voice that was repeating by my side—"*Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us.*"

Next day, while the railway was whirling Dunnismore every minute farther away from Whitminster, George and I were entering the grey old minster and taking our places amid a crowd of boys and white-robed girls. The chancel was crowded; the organ pealed forth its grandest notes;

most earnest words were spoken; the sincerest prayers went up from loving hearts. And our minds, too, were hushed to a solemn mood. The littleness and laughter of schoolboy life seemed to give place for the moment to grander thoughts; for we felt that we were laying aside the thoughtlessness of childhood and setting ourselves to play the part of men in the mysterious battle of life. Too little did we understand what we were undertaking to do or how it behoved us to do it; we were but as we have seen in these pages, neither very wise nor very good; but honestly, if ignorantly, we sought to be enabled to know and to do our duty, and it has been promised that none so seeking shall seek in vain.

There is another chapter to be told in my friend's school days and mine, but this one closes at the hour when we knelt side by side before the holy altar and with our own lips took the vow, breathed years ago over our unconscious brows, that, heaven helping us, we would manfully fight under Christ's banner, and be His faithful soldiers and servants unto our lives' end.



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